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THE INDEPENDENT

Saturday 14 March 1998 70p (IR70p) No 3,558

Newspaper of the Year for photographs

Sunday Times is trying to smear me, says Prescott

Exclusive

By Anthony Bevis,
Steve Boggan
and Andrew Buncombe

JOHN PRESCOTT last night accused the *Sunday Times* of "planting a reporter in his constituency Labour Party to act as a back agent provocateur, influencing allegations and local 'bourgeois' title-tattle" of sleaze and scandal.

A report yesterday from the government auditors cleared Ed Prescott of any impropriety in the sale of Hull Housing Action Trust houses to a company which employed the Deputy Prime Minister's son, Jonathan Prescott.

Mr Prescott launched his outspoken attack on Rupert Murdoch's *Sunday Times* - the paper that carried allegations last weekend that he had failed to declare a £27,750 donation from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, and a report headlined: "Prescott's son may cash in as council homes go cheap."

In an attack that might well displease No 10 - which has been cultivating Mr Murdoch and his empire - Mr Prescott accused the newspaper of running a politically-motivated campaign to smear him, fuelled by a man who had been "planted" in his Hull East constituency party.

He told *The Independent* that the undercover reporter was Simon Trump, who had switched membership of the Bristol West Labour Party to Hull East in August 1996. Martin Ivens, the paper's deputy editor, last night confirmed that Mr Trump had been sent up to Hull "to get stories", having previously worked for the paper in the West Country.

"The *Sunday Times* role, both in the incident for myself and East Hull," Mr Prescott said, "has been one that has had more political content and mo-



John Prescott: Received tip-off about infiltrators

divation than that of journalists trying to find out what is wrong. It's a kind of, almost agent provocateur role."

The investigation into Mr Prescott was launched by the newspaper more than 12 months ago and was referred to inside its Wapping offices as Project X.

Neighbours at the three-storey Victorian house that Trump described as "home" said yesterday that he was seldom seen, but when he was, he described himself as a "traveling salesman".

He occupied a ground-floor bedsit at 17 Westcott St, a stone's throw from the Hull East Labour Party headquarters, where Mr Prescott holds his surgeries and which Trump infiltrated.

Yet there is no evidence that he intended to use it as a permanent base. Inquiries by *The Independent* have established that he was not on the electoral register and none of his credit cards were registered at the address.

Andrew Thomas, a 36-year-old student said: "We hardly ever saw him, but he wasn't here very often. I spoke to him once and he said he was a travelling salesman and simply used the flat as a base."

"But we did notice in the

mail lots of Labour Party literature for him. I remember in particular one envelope that quite clearly said: 'Labour Party membership'. He was a very clean-cut chap and I did notice that he has a very new car."

Comparing what was happening now on the *Sunday Times* with what had happened more than 30 years ago, when he had been investigated by the same newspaper for his role in the controversial 1966 seamen's strike, Mr Prescott said: "It's a very shabby shadow of the those days."

"Now you get in there, tell them you're a mate, muck around in all the crap. It's not even an issue of politics. This is about internal title-tattle."

"The *Sunday Times* went up there with the object of showing corruption. They couldn't show corruption, and so he feeds the concept of corruption with all the title-tattle."

He told *The Independent* that he had been tipped off last year, after the May election, that people had been put into Hull to find corruption. "I was given a name, this man Trump. I checked it out; he had been in Bristol, then he changed to Hull, and I asked around the councillors and I asked my agent and he said he had heard this guy had been accepted by the party and [was] going out with the councillors for drinks and things like that."

Mr Prescott, Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, called the auditors in after allegations that 25 homes had been sold to Wyke Developments at a knockdown price of just over £5,000 each, when they were worth about £20,000.

The inquiry found that a "satisfactory price" was achieved for the taxpayer in the sale by the North Hull Housing Action Trust to Wyke Developments and that ministers were not involved in the transaction.

Travolta shows his true Primary Colors



Film first: John Travolta and his wife Kelly with a fake cover of *Time* arriving at the premiere in Los Angeles of *Primary Colors*, in which he plays the President Photograph: AFP

By Tim Cornwell
in Los Angeles

CANDIDATE John Travolta arrives in American theatres next week. The film version of *Primary Colors*, the novel that set Washington on fire with its thinly veiled portrayal of the 1992 Clinton campaign, premiered in Los Angeles on Thursday night.

The film's boosters say Travolta's portrayal of Jack Stanton - read Bill Clinton - is uncanny, from the moist eyes and high-rising silver hair to the presidential bug and Arkansas drawl. Travolta is backed by Emma Thompson, aka Hillary, as the politician's wife, and British actor Adrian Lester as the story's narrator and con-

science, Henry Burton, closely compared to Clinton campaign glamour boy George Stephanopoulos.

For film buffs, there is the particular pleasure of seeing Billy Bob Thornton, fresh from his role as a half-crazed killer in *Slingblade*, playing the fictional version of Clinton's political aide, James Carville.

The huge publicity promises a major Hollywood debut for stage actor Lester, 27. Thompson, he told *USA Today*, "held my hand because she knew what it was like coming to Los Angeles. She made sure I didn't feel too lonely, and I will never forget that."

The timing could not have been better for its makers, or apparently worse for Bill Clinton,

at a time when Monica Lewinsky has at last moved off the front pages. In the film Jack Stanton's "bimbo" arrives as hairdresser Cashmere McLeod, played by Gia Carides, for whom read nightclub singer Jennifer Flowers.

But the film is not as sharp in its portrayal of Clinton as the book, whose anonymous author was finally revealed as *Newsweek* writer Joe Klein.

Travolta, 44, was paid a reported \$17m. But he is a self-proclaimed fan of the President who says he has taken "zero interest" in the Lewinsky affair. "I knew the film was not going to be a cheap shot," he said. "There are other issues, such as... the truth of politics, and rising above that truth."

Hacker stole secrets of stars from dustbins

By Steve Boggan

A TRAINEE solicitor collected secret information on some of the top names in showbusiness - including Elton John and Lord Lloyd-Webber - by hacking into their agent's computer and rummaging through his dustbins.

Other stars whose personal details he obtained include Lloyd Cole, Lionel Richie, the dancer Michael Flatley and Barry Humphries.

Among items seen by *The Independent* are tour arrangements for Sir Elton, details of a private performance he gave for the Sultan of Brunei, the home telephone numbers and worldwide addresses for a host of stars and even an internal memo to staff warning them to be careful of how they dispose of their rubbish. Some documents bore the words "To be shredded".

Benjamin Pell, 34, who is now being sued by Sir Elton and the agent, John Reid Enterprises, says he amassed 75 bags of papers, including bank statements, confidential legal correspondence and tour arrangements before being stopped by a High Court injunction.

For six months after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, Mr Pell kept an electronic and physical vigil on the London offices of Mr Reid in the hope of discovering secrets about her friendship with Elton John, whose song "Candle In The Wind" was re-dedicated to her.

"I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw how easy it was to get hold of this stuff," Mr Pell, who also works as a freelance music journalist, told *The Independent*. "I went through their rubbish and I got some

very clever computer nerds to hack into the system for me. Getting into the computer system was even easier than getting into the rubbish."

"I am a fan of Elton's and I wondered whether I could find anything out after Diana's death. I certainly don't usually go through people's rubbish or hack into their computers."

Through his dual snooping, Mr Pell found copies of Elton John's bank statements and letters from his accountants, Price Waterhouse, expressing concern over his rates of expenditure on luxury items. These details were published in the *Mirror* newspaper, resulting in writs being issued against Mr Pell, the publicist Max Clifford and the *Mirror*.

He also found copies of letters from Sir Elton and Richard Branson arguing over the inclusion of "Candle In The Wind" on a charity album. He insists that the Price Waterhouse letters and the Branson exchanges were found in rubbish outside the agent's offices.

Mr Pell is now limited in what he can say about the affair. Lawyers for Mr Reid succeeded in having a strict Anton Piller order issued against him, allowing them to freeze his assets and search at his address. They did not manage to recover any of the documents, which *The Independent* understands are still in existence, possibly abroad.

Mr Reid is in Australia on business. Nicola Turnbull, his director of business affairs, said the company was unable to comment because of the pending legal actions. It is understood, however, that the company will deny that confidential information was thrown out as rubbish.

Lawrence case officer faces charge

By Matthew Brace

The Police Complaints Authority (PCA) has recommended that a senior officer involved in the original inquiry into the murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence, called five years ago, should face a charge of neglect of duty.

Stephen, a bright, popular, 18-year-old student, was stabbed to death at a bus stop in Eltham, south-east London, by a gang of white youths in April 1993. Nobody has been convicted of the murder.

The officer involved has not

been suspended or named, nor the rank revealed, and Scotland Yard was last night considering if the individual would face an internal disciplinary board.

The board has a wide range of options to consider if the officer was disciplined, including dismissal from the force.

The PCA stated: "Authority member Ms Joe Dobry has recommended that one senior officer who is still serving with the Metropolitan Police service should face a charge of neglect of duty."

The PCA investigation started in spring last year following the inquest into Stephen's death that found he was unlawfully killed in a racially motivated attack by five white youths.

The Lawrence family called for an investigation into the police handling of the case and a report on the investigation



Stephen Lawrence: stabbed by a gang of white youths

was published last December. A spokeswoman for the Metropolitan Police said last night: "We have received their recommendation and the matter is under discussion. This is

being considered by the Metropolitan Police Service. If necessary, the authority has the power to direct the Metropolitan Police Service to charge the officer."

Stephen's father, Neville Lawrence, said the news was a small step in the right direction, but not enough. "One of the main things I have said all along is that when I feel vindicated is when somebody's doing time, and that's the only time I am going to feel vindicated in any way," he told the BBC's *Six O'Clock News*.

A member of the Stephen Lawrence campaign, Mrs Ros Howells, added: "We have always known that the police failed. It's a pity that it's just one police officer and the others have retired, but we think it's great news."

"I think this has come as quite a shock to Doreen

Lawrence. But five years on we will never feel good until the perpetrators of the crime are behind bars."

It is unusual that the Lawrence family has been informed of the PCA's recommendation before the Metropolitan Police have had a chance to consider it, but this move highlights the high profile that the case has taken. The Stephen Lawrence Campaign has petitioned constantly during the years since Stephen's death for justice, often in the face of seemingly impossible odds.

A source at the PCA said: "This has been forced upon us by the demands of the inquiry. We decided it was important that all officers should know whether they faced disciplinary charges. We also felt that if the officers knew, the family should know too."

Today's news

Call for flexibility in murder sentence

The mandatory life sentence for murder should be abolished and judges, not the Home Secretary, should decide the terms, the Lord Chief Justice said yesterday. Page 4

Britons killed on Greek island

A British couple have been stabbed to death in their retirement home on the Greek island of Cephalonia. Page 3

Dome gas angers environmentalists

Environmentalists vowed to resume their battle against the millennium dome after it became known that its air conditioning system would use a powerful "greenhouse gas". Page 5

MOUTH
WATERING
OYSTERS.
(BUT NOT
FROM OUR
FOOD HALL.)



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Bingham in plea over murder sentences

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

MANDATORY life sentences for murder should be abolished and judges, not the Home Secretary, should decide the terms served by murderers, the Lord Chief Justice said yesterday.

The current situation ignores "a cardinal principle of morality, justice and democratic government" - that the prison term to be served should be announced in open court, Lord Bingham told an audience of senior police officers.

Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, moved quickly, however, to quash any possibility of the Government taking up Lord Bingham's proposal. And victims' families angrily rejected the proposal as "ludicrous".

In his speech, Lord Bingham rejected the argument that murder was such a uniquely evil crime that only a life term would do, as "at best, a quarter truth".

Murders varied greatly and it was "unjustifiable" to treat them all the same, he said. He cited as an example the case of paratrooper Lee Clegg, who was jailed for life for the murder of a joyrider in Belfast. Although Clegg has been granted a retrial, Lord Bingham said even if he was guilty as originally charged, he did not deserve the same sentence as a mass murderer like Fred West.

Lord Bingham said the real problem lay in the obligation to pass a life sentence on all murderers. And he added that the current rules ignored "a cardinal principle of morality, justice and democratic government" - that the prison term to be served should be announced in open court.

At present, all murderers are automatically jailed for life.

The judge in secret recommends a term of years to be served - the "tariff" - but this can be altered by the Lord Chief Justice and the Home Secretary. Once the tariff is served, the Home Secretary decides when the killer should be released.

That means the life sentence "is no more than a formula which gave no real due to the offender, to the victim's family, to the media or to the public at large, what in practical terms of years to be served in prison the sentence meant", Lord Bingham said.

In his response, the Home Secretary said mandatory life sentences were necessary to protect the public and ensure the punishment imposed on criminals fitted their crime.

"Murder is very different from all other categories of offence. The public expect and require greater protection from murderers," Mr Straw said.

Lord Bingham was accused of being "completely out of touch with reality" by Norman Black, of Support After Murder and Manslaughter, whose girlfriend was murdered four years ago. "It's an insult to the bereaved who are left behind," he said. "We don't want revenge but we do want retribution ...

"Proper sentencing won't bring anyone back but it will give us a sense of justice. To try and do away with the life sentence is simply degrading to us."

Lord Bingham's proposal was welcomed, however, by the civil rights group Liberty. "Mandatory life sentences prevent the court giving a sentence that is appropriate and just," said Liberty director John Wadham. "They allow politicians to interfere with sentencing and allow them to decide when another person should be released from prison - matters which should be left to the courts."



The delegation led by Sir William Macpherson at the scene of Stephen Lawrence's murder yesterday

Photograph: Kalpesh Ladigra

Lawrence inquiry chief visits site of killing

By Matthew Brace

THE MAN heading a new inquiry into the murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence paid an emotional visit to the site of the attack in Eltham, south-east London, yesterday.

Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, a retired High Court judge, said his visit was a bid to encourage witnesses to come

forward, and was also "in memory of Stephen".

"It is right that this inquiry is into his death and it seemed to me right to come here and remind people of the terrible events of five years ago," Sir William said.

He spent several minutes looking at a memorial stone in the pavement at the spot where Stephen died, which was dedicated last week.

Stephen Lawrence, 18, was killed in a racist attack on a Sunday night in April 1993. No one has been convicted of the crime, and a criminal "review" is under "prosecution".

Sir William has already appealed for more witnesses to come forward and give evidence to the inquiry, which gets un-

der way on Monday at the Elephant and Castle, south London.

He admitted yesterday that no one had responded to his appeal but he said he still hoped that the inquiry, announced by the Home Secretary Jack Straw last July, would help solve some of the questions surrounding the case.

"I hope it will lance the boil and help the Lawrences come

to terms with the dreadful events of five years ago," he said.

"New prosecutions are unlikely, as everyone who knows about this case must realise, but it's impossible to forecast what will come out of this inquiry."

Five men were arrested in connection with the murder but charges against two were dropped in September 1995. The trial of the remaining three

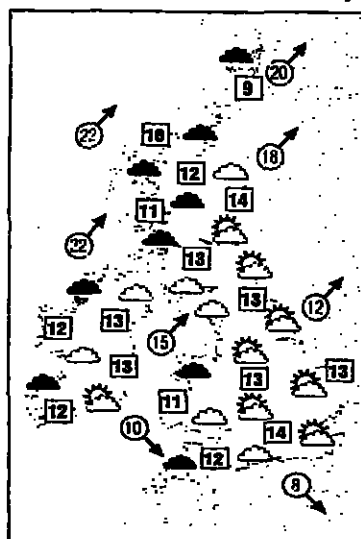
collapsed at the Old Bailey the following year.

An inquest last year decided that Stephen was unlawfully killed in an unprovoked racist attack by five white youths.

Sir William, who has visited the spot since before, added that another reason for yesterday's visit was to "mark our disgust at the vandalism that was perpetrated". "It was an unspeakable act," he said.

WEATHER

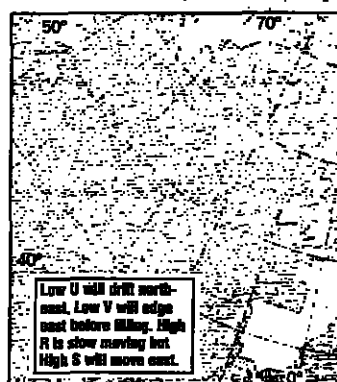
The British Isles, noon today



General summary and outlook

Scotland will be very mild but mainly cloudy and breezy with occasional drizzly rain, more especially over west-facing coasts and hills. Sheltered areas of eastern Scotland will be a little brighter with a few sunny intervals and the highest temperatures. Northern Ireland, northern England and north Wales will also be largely cloudy but mild with nothing worse than a few spots of drizzle. Meanwhile, south Wales and the rest of England will be dry and mild with a mix of cloud and a few sunny spells. Sunday will be mild again everywhere with the best of the sunny spells in the south. Northern Scotland will have some light rain, and this damp weather will extend across Northern Ireland and southern Scotland by evening. On Monday drizzly rain will edge south through England and Wales, but Scotland and Northern Ireland will turn brighter and colder. Tuesday will be cold with a brisk wind and a mix of sunshine and showers.

Atlantic chart, noon today



World weather most recent available figure at noon local time

Athens	13.55	Flourno	18.58	New York	-2.28
Auckland	21.70	Frankfurt	8.41	Nice	14.57
B. Aires	20.88	Geneva	7.45	Osaka	18.64
Bangkok	35.95	Hilbrath	14.57	Paris	7.45
Barcelona	12.34	Hofstad	-5.21	Prague	2.35
Belfast	18.64	Hong Kong	26.68	Rangoon	7.48
Bombay	9.48	Istanbul	8.48	Seoul	28.84
Buenos Aires	4.38	Jakarta	21.78	Singapore	28.84
Calcutta	12.34	Jerusalem	21.78	Taipei	13.55
Cairo	5.41	K. Lumpur	33.91	Tokyo	-2.28
Cardiff	5.41	London	18.58	Sydney	21.88
Chennai	20.88	Los Angeles	21.78	Toronto	22.72
Cebu	27.91	Madrid	8.48	Ulaanbaatar	13.55
Colombo	18.64	Manila	12.64	Vladivostok	18.58
Copenhagen	18.64	Moscow	17.83	Yokohama	18.58
Dhaka	2.35	Mumbai	25.77		
Dublin	13.55	Perth	-13.55		
Edinburgh	28.84	Rangoon	2.35		
Helsinki	24.75	Seoul	1.28		

AA Roadwatch

London, A1 Watford Way. Major roadworks continue both ways between Mill Hill Circus and Finsbury Park. Until December 1999.

Greater London, A4020, Uxbridge Road. Easting Roadworks at Broughton Road West. Until April 3.

A406, between Hanger Lane and Ealing Common. Major roadworks until March 20. A5 Kilburn Park Road. Contrailow in both directions for gas repairs. Until May 2.

A5200, York Way, Kings Cross. Lane reductions at Goods Way for long term work on Maiden Lane Bridge. Until Aug 1.

Southwest, M22-23. Major roadworks & contraflow. Until April 23.

A46 Bath-Cold Ashton. Major roadworks continue. Until July 30.

West Midlands, M5 at the M6 J8 Birmingham (M6). Narrow lanes on link to M6 North due to roadworks. Occasional overnight closures. Until April 17.

West Yorkshire, M62 J28-29, Dewsbury to Leeds. Contraflow and restrictions. Until Dec 31 1999.

Greater Manchester, A666 between Eastworth & Kearsley. St Peter's Way Roadworks with no access to St Peter's Way from the Kearsley Roundabout. Until 20th May.

Lancashire, M6 between J32 Preston (M55) and J33 Lancaster (A6). Lane closure. 2 times only either way.

Out and about with AA Roadwatch call 0330 401 for the latest local and national traffic news. Source: The Automobile Association. Calls charged at 50p per min (cheap rate 45p per min (all other times) inc VAT.

Lighting-up times

TODAY		TOMORROW	
Belfast	18.25 to 6.39	Belfast	18.27 to 6.37
Birmingham	18.09 to 6.22	Birmingham	18.11 to 6.20
Bristol	18.13 to 6.25	Bristol	18.15 to 6.23
Glasgow	18.18 to 6.33	Glasgow	18.20 to 6.30
London	18.03 to 6.15	London	18.05 to 6.13
Manchester	18.11 to 6.24	Manchester	18.13 to 6.22
Newcastle	18.08 to 6.22	Newcastle	18.10 to 6.20
Nottingham	18.08 to 6.17	Nottingham	18.10 to 6.15

Air quality

Yesterday's Readings		Outlook for Today	
London	NO ₂ Moderate	London	NO ₂ Moderate
S. England	Moderate	S. England	Moderate
Wales	Good	Wales	Moderate
C. England	Moderate	C. England	Moderate
N. England	Good	N. England	Good
Scotland	Good	Scotland	Good
N. Ireland	Good	N. Ireland	Good

High tides

	AM	HT	PM	HT
London	02:37	7.1	14:57	7.2
Liverpool	n/a	n/a	12:04	9.3
Avonmouth	08:00	13.0	20:18	13.1
Hull (Albert Dock)	07:07	8.4	19:18	8.7
Greenock	01:29	3.1	13:19	3.4
Don Langhain	00:01	3.8	12:18	4.1

Sun and moon

Sun rises	06:18
Sun sets	18:03
Moon rises	19:30
Moon sets	06:56
Last Quarter: March 21	

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Immortal – for the time being at least

"YELTSIN is like a cat, he has nine lives," a Russian equities trader commented yesterday when the markets dipped on the news that once again the 67-year-old Kremlin leader was ill. The stock exchange is sensitive to such matters. National television was less excited, leading its news bulletins with the latest on the expulsion of Russian diplomats from Norway. The man in the street shrugged his shoulders, sure that the President would soon be back.

Mr Yeltsin, who had his finest hour atop a tank resisting a hardline coup attempt in 1991, thrives on situations where he has to fight. He is not a man to let mere illness get him down.

And we can only hope that the relative glasnost of post-Communist Russia is our guarantee that when we are told officially he has "acute laryngotracheitis", he really does have a sore throat or something similar and not some life-threatening illness. Leonid Brezhnev, after all, was still described as having a cold when he lay on his death bed.

Still, since he underwent a heart bypass operation in November 1996, the Russian President's health has been a cause for worry throughout the world. Under pressure from the press, Mr Yeltsin has had to learn to be more honest about it.

He first disappeared into hospital without any explanation after Mikhail Gorbachev, then leader of the Soviet Union, sacked him from the ruling Communist Party Politburo in 1987. In retrospect, it seems this shock may have marked the start of his heart problems.

But Mr Gorbachev unwittingly helped his career by making him a martyr and, when he came out of hospital, he went on to become the most popular opposition politician in Russia. He was elected Russian President in June 1991 and took over from Mr Gorbachev as Kremlin leader when the Soviet Union collapsed later that year.

The heavy-drinking Yeltsin tried to keep fit by playing tennis. But heart problems continued to dog him, bursting out into the open last year: he made her an official presidential aide, responsible for his image. Tatyana, 38, a former rocket scientist, apparently plays a stronger role behind the throne than Mr Yeltsin's wife, Naina, who is said to like baking cakes and looking after the grandchildren.

IN THE NEWS

BORIS YELTSIN

Just after he had won a second term as Russian President in the summer of 1996. At first, as yesterday, aides said he had a sore throat; but his continued absence from public view so soon after he had won a stunning election victory against all the odds looked suspicious. Soon they were forced to admit that the blood supply to his heart was deficient.

Mr Yeltsin then came clean to the Russian people himself, saying the life of an invalid was not for him and he had decided to undergo a heart bypass, a relatively routine operation in the West, so that he could return to politics with renewed vigour.

The operation, carried out by a team of Russian doctors with the Texas heart specialist Michael De Bakay hovering in the background, was described in surprising detail to the press. Dr De Bakay declared Mr Yeltsin's operation a complete success, saying it would give him 10 more years of life if he controlled his drinking and resisted his favourite fatty foods, such as Russian sausage. But unfortunately, straight after the operation, the Kremlin leader caught a cold and fell ill with pneumonia in the freezing January of 1997. His return to politics was delayed until last spring.

Since then he has been active both on the international stage and at home. He takes more holidays than a younger leader might do – his fishing and skiing trips are televised to assure us of his continuing robustness. He is clearly ageing, and yet, though his enemies say it, he is not like Brezhnev, just a corpse being propped up for show. He is still mentally alert and, when the spade work has been done by his underlings, he is still the man who takes the ultimate decisions.

BORIS AND THE BOTTLE

Does Boris Yeltsin drink? Is the Pope a Catholic? Before he underwent heart surgery in November 1996, it would hardly have occurred to vodka-loving Russians to doubt that their President drank. They would not have respected him if he had abstained. Does Boris Yeltsin drink now? There is no real evidence of any hard drinking nowadays.

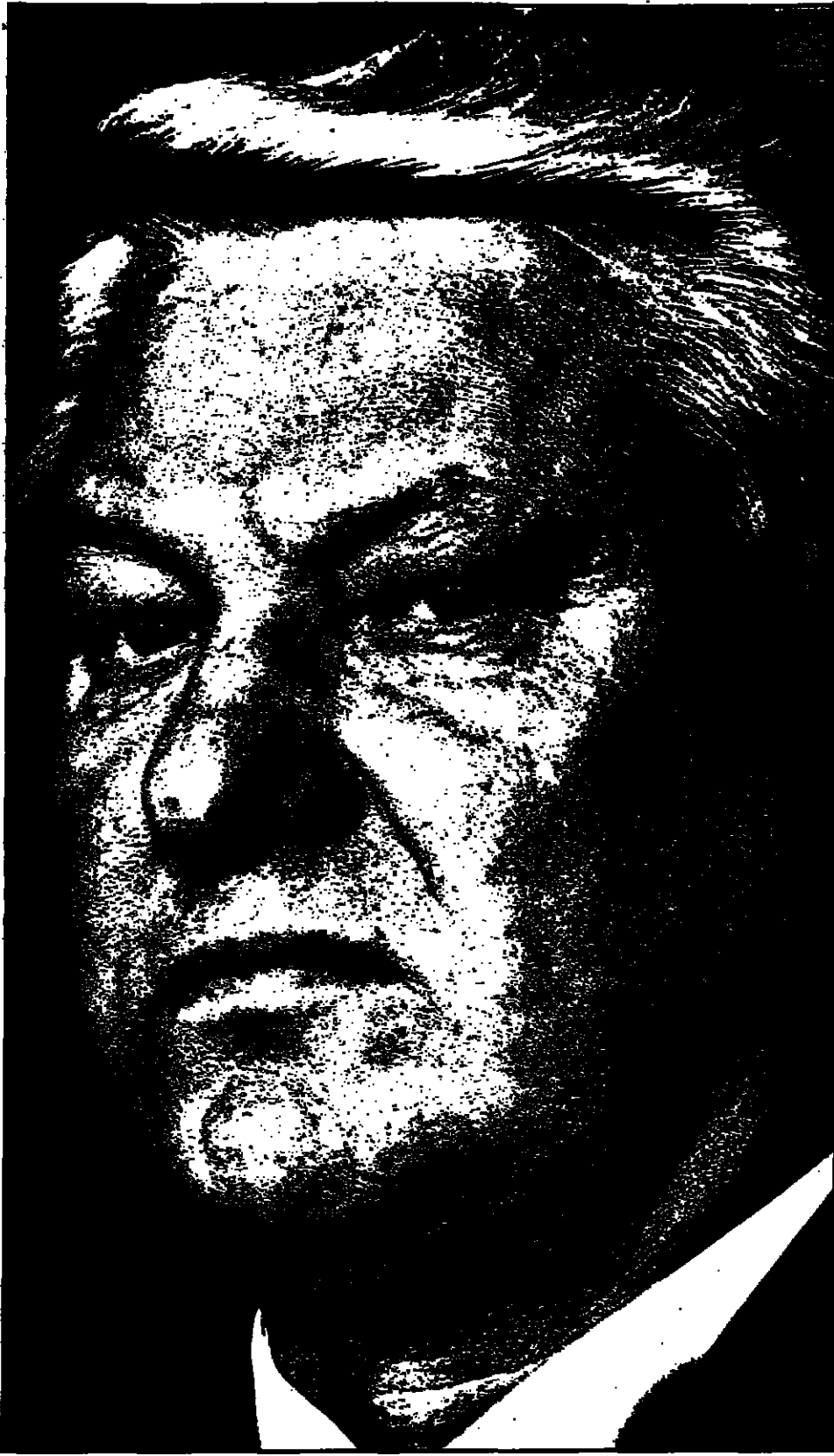
DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

Whether Mr Yeltsin retires with dignity or tries to extend what his enemies call his "Tsar-like rule" into the next century may depend on the advice he receives from his eldest daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko. He trusts her so much that

last year he made her an official presidential aide, responsible for his image. Tatyana, 38, a former rocket scientist, apparently plays a stronger role behind the throne than Mr Yeltsin's wife, Naina, who is said to like baking cakes and looking after the grandchildren.

WHAT NEXT?

The great constitutional question of the moment is not who would replace Yeltsin in the immediate aftermath of his death, but rather could Mr Yeltsin stand for a third term? His President? Recently he commented that the best guarantee of good relations between Moscow and Kiev was not to change the presidents of Russia and Ukraine.



Survivor: 'Yeltsin is like a cat, he has nine lives' said one Russian. Photograph: Brian Harris

Britons stabbed to death on Greek isle

By Louise Jury

A BRITISH couple have been stabbed to death at their retirement home on the Greek island of Cephalonia.

Roy Eccles, 55, and his wife, Judith, 49, were found by Mrs Eccles' brother, who was visiting the island, in the early hours of Thursday, the Foreign Office said. They are believed to have been killed in their beds. Their car was found abandoned 25 miles away near the ferry port of Sami, where boats connect with Patras on the mainland. Forty extra police officers were drafted in from the mainland yesterday to help with the inquiry, and a specialist team was due to examine the car.

The murders have shocked the peaceful island made famous by Louis de Bernieres' book, *Captain Correlli's Mandolin*. A local police official said: "This is an unprecedented crime in our area."

Mr Eccles, a former electrical engineer, and his wife, an accountant, had retired from Cambridgeshire to their newly-built house on the edge of the village of Kaminarata last October.

A police spokesman said they were not sure of the motive for the attack. The victims suffered multiple stab wounds and the house was ransacked, but there were several puzzling features.

"The state of the house means that burglary is possible, but we found a lot of jewellery and other expensive things left behind," he said. "We are looking at other possibilities. It could have been over an argument. But we tend to go for robbery at the moment."

Nick Sklavounakis, the owner of a holiday apartment block in Argostoli, the biggest town on



Murdered in their beds: Roy Eccles and his wife Judith



the island, said the murders had shocked everyone.

"Cephalonia is a peaceful place and I don't remember there ever being a murder before," he said. "The worst thing that happens is in the summer when the island fills up with visitors and sometimes people get killed in road accidents."

Captain Correlli's Mandolin, the book which features the island, the largest in the Ionian chain, has been in the bestseller list for months. It charts the Italian occupation during the Second World War and the idea that paradise can be violated by evil. As many as one in five of the thousands of Britons who visit the island are estimated to arrive with a copy of the novel.

Male primary teachers join the endangered species list

By Judith Judd
Education Editor

Male primary teachers are becoming an endangered species. Only nine per cent of sixth-form boys put teaching as their top career choice compared with 40 per cent of girls, according to a new survey published today.

Men account for only 17 per cent of primary school teachers and, if the decline continues at the present rate, the male primary teacher will have disappeared by the year 2010.

Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, blamed pay for the feminisation of the profession. "Teaching is OK for a second income in a family but as a first income – which is what young men might more likely be looking for – it is extremely unattractive."

He gave the example of an unruly eight-year-old who was recently visited by a male educational psychologist. "He called her Miss. As far as this boy was concerned, maleness



A rare breed: there aren't many left like John Alderton

and education were obviously mutually exclusive." Figures published recently show that in 1996 only 8,262 men entered teacher training compared with 19,630 women.

Eighty eight per cent of primary classroom teachers are women and the proportion of female deputy heads and heads is rising.

Even in secondary schools, where men have traditionally outnumbered women, there are

now 96,000 female teachers compared with 90,000 men.

Yesterday's survey, carried out by the Teacher Training Agency and the National Union of Teachers, comes at a time when the proportion of male teachers is falling steadily.

Doug McAvoy, the union's general secretary, said the findings were worrying. "The poorer performance of boys compared with girls has in part been linked with a lack of male

role models in early education."

The survey of more than 1,000 16-19-year-olds showed that twice as many girls as boys said they would be attracted to teaching by levels of pay. Both sexes found long holidays a very attractive part of the job and were most put off by the idea of unruly pupils.

There is growing concern about teacher recruitment. The Commons Select Committee on Education recently warned ministers that urgent action was needed. Applications for one-year postgraduate courses are down by 10 per cent. The drop for maths is 22 per cent and for physics 34 per cent.

John Howson, an educational consultant and former adviser to the Teacher Training Agency, said: "Women are going into teaching because they think it involves a lifestyle which includes quality time for children. All this talk from the Government about longer hours and teachers taking on literacy and numeracy summer schools in the holidays is a high-risk strategy."

Milk chocolate wins a reprieve from Brussels

By Katherine Butler in Brussels

THERE is fresh news from the front in the Great Chocolate War – traditional British milk chocolate has been saved by the Brussels bureaucrats.

In the latest twist to a long-running saga, the European Commission has rejected attempts by chocolate purists on the Continent to force British people to buy only chocolate made from pure cocoa.

To the dismay of rival confectioners in Belgium and France, the Commission has overruled members of the European Parliament, who in a shock vote last October raised the prospect of a ban on British people buying Milk Tray or Cadbury's Dairy Milk. MEPs had deleted a key phrase from a proposed new EU chocolate law which stated: "The UK and Ireland may authorise the use in their territory of the name

milk chocolate to designate the product". This would have forced Cadbury's to change the recipe if they wanted to go on describing their bars as milk chocolate, either on the home market or for export.

But the Commission has ignored this amendment in its latest version of the directive. Brussels has also thrown out an amendment insisting that there can be no new chocolate legislation until scientists devise a reliable method for monitoring the amount of vegetable fat in a bar of chocolate.

The chocolate war is as old as Britain's membership of the European Union and the new chocolate directive is the Commission's attempt to end it. In 1973 the UK and Ireland were granted exemptions from a ban on making chocolate from anything other than cocoa butter.

But while we were allowed to indulge

the national craving for sweet milky bars made with up to 5 per cent vegetable fat, regarded as inferior on the Continent, the EU banned the export of British chocolate to the rest of Europe. The new directive would open up the trade for the first time in almost 25 years, although it looks as if we may have a single currency before we have a true European chocolate union.

Poor cocoa-producing countries such as Ivory Coast are deeply upset by the latest Commission ruling. "They are not taking into account the interests of producing countries," although this directive will lead to a reduction in consumption of cocoa," said Silas Kamga, secretary general of the Cocoa Producers Association. And MEPs will get another attempt to stymie the Commission's proposal when the legislation comes back for a second reading in a few weeks' time.

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Mr Foster described his Bill as "still alive and kicking" and said: "I think hunting with dogs will be banned by the end of this Parliament. We are not going to go away."

Road-sweep lorry death

Stephanie suffered massive injuries and was pronounced dead on arrival at hospital. Her sisters, Marie McCormack, 19, and Natalie Popai, 13, suffered head injuries, and three-year-old Selina Shaw was treated for minor grazes and facial injuries.



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Stephanie suffered massive injuries and was pronounced dead on arrival at hospital. Her sisters, Marie McCormack, 19, and Natalie Popai, 13, suffered head injuries, and three-year-old Selina Shaw was treated for minor grazes and facial injuries.

Global warming gas to cool Dome

By Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

ENVIRONMENTALISTS vowed to resume their battle against the Millennium Dome yesterday, after it was announced that its huge air conditioning system would use an extremely powerful "greenhouse" gas.

The state-owned New Millennium Experience Company has selected a system using HFC which, molecule for molecule, is more than 1,000 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the Earth's atmosphere.

That is why HFC is one of six gases which developed nations, including Britain, agreed to curb at the Kyoto global warming summit in Japan just three months ago.

Now, Greenpeace is asking why the British government is specifying the gas for one of the biggest air-conditioning contracts it will ever award. "This is a very bad decision and we'll do everything we can to stop it being implemented," said Peter Melchett, Greenpeace UK's executive director.

The Dome is expected to need year-round air conditioning as thousands of people flock through its vast enclosed space. When the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) advertised for a contractor last summer, it specified that HFC should be used. Now a major US company, Carrier, has won the £1.5m contract which will use nearly seven tonnes of HFC.

This was regarded as much greener than the now banned CFCs and soon-to-be-banned HCFCs used in many conventional air-conditioning systems. CFCs and HCFCs are frowned on because they are destroying the Earth's protective ozone layer, which keeps out harmful ultra-violet radiation.

Yet HFC could make a major contribution to an even bigger environmental problem, global warming, if its use as a CFC-replacement continues to grow rapidly.

Yesterday the NMEC said only one per cent of the gas would be allowed to leak out in a year. Chief executive Jennifer Page said that being able to remove and sell the air conditioning system once the year-long millennium exhibition was over was a key consideration. Whoever takes over the gigantic structure may well not need such a large system.

The Dome organisers also wanted air conditioning which was tried and tested and could be installed quickly, rather than opting for something less orthodox which set new standards in protecting the environment.

But the decision has come as a bitter disappointment to some UK air conditioning contractors and Greenpeace. It had hoped that John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment - who played a leading role in brokering the Kyoto climate agreement - would intervene to stop HFCs being used.

In the end, he decided not to, confining himself to writing a letter to the minister in charge of the Dome, Peter Mandelson, which merely expressed disappointment at the choice of air conditioning system.

There are alternatives to HFCs, CFCs and HCFCs, which have been used in large office blocks in Britain. London Transport has two offices with air conditioners which use hydrocarbons.

Nick Cox, sales director with air conditioning firm Earth Care, said: "Using HFCs is like switching from high tar to low tar cigarettes. The Dome [company] has to America for the quickest, easiest option when they should have been promoting green, British technology. It's a disappointment for UK industry and the environment."

Greenpeace had earlier threatened to disrupt the Dome's construction because it would have been roofed with PVC plastic, but the Government changed its mind and chose Teflon instead.

Death study to be taken with a pinch of salt

By Jeremy Laurence
Health Editor

Salt is bad for you - or it may be good for you, depending on the latest scientific paper you read.

The link between salt and health is thrown into confusion today with the publication of a study suggesting that those who eat least die soonest.

Previous research has suggested that high consumption of salt increases the risk of early death and current UK government advice is to cut consumption by 30 per cent.

For the new study, researchers at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York examined details of the diets of over 11,000 Americans collected between 1971 and 1975.

The participants had been asked to record all they ate in a 24-hour period.

The researchers then examined death records for 1992 to see who had died in the intervening 20 years.

They found those with the highest salt intake - in the top quarter of the study group - had an 18 per cent lower death rate than those in the lowest group.

The results, published in *The Lancet*, are valuable, according to the researchers, because they link salt intake with eventual death rather than with blood pressure, as other studies have

done. They conclude that the results are not strong enough to justify advice to increase salt intake but they also "do not support current recommendations for routine reduction of sodium consumption."

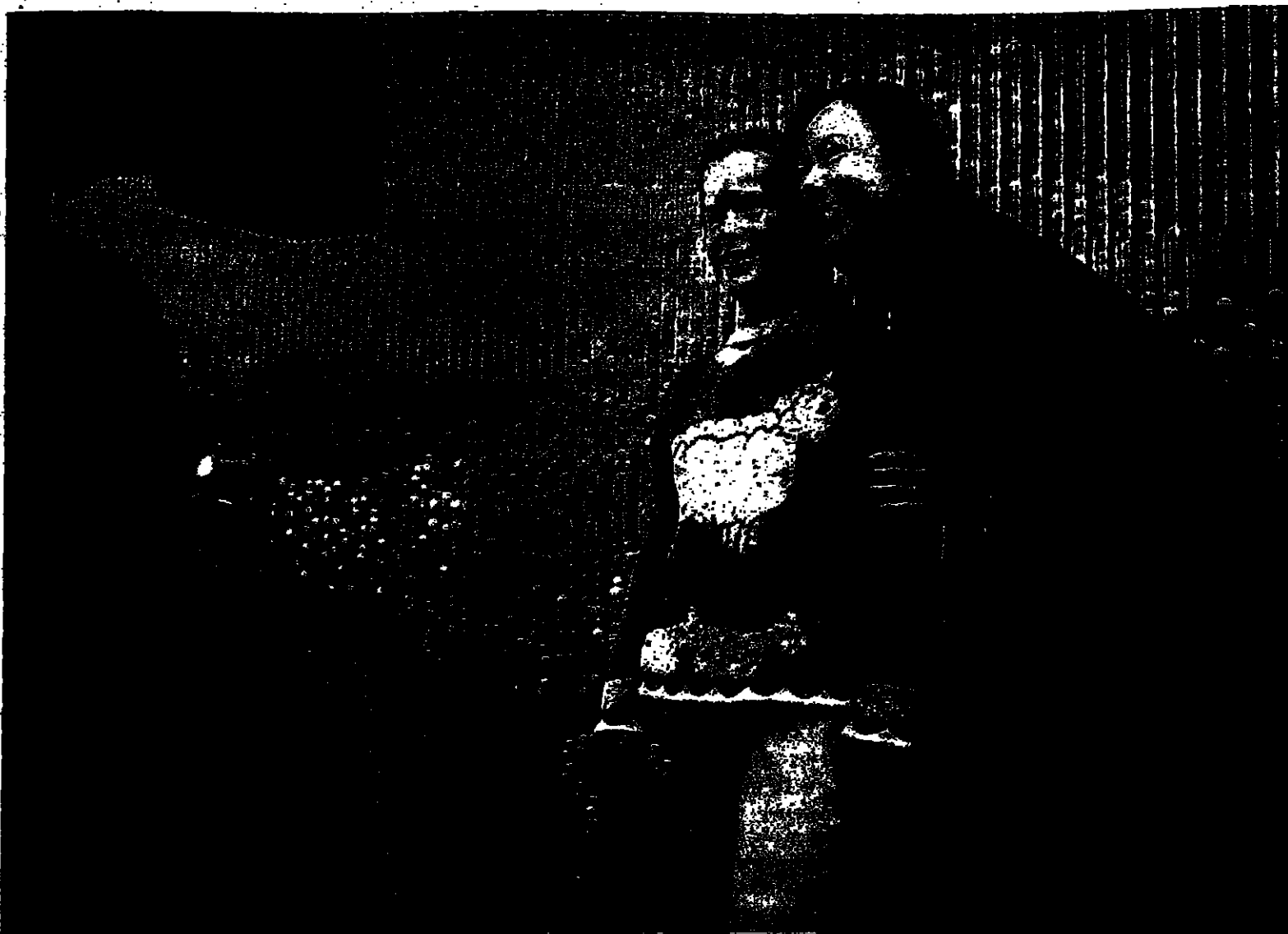
UK scientists said the paper contained "misleading statements and methodological flaws" and said the practice of assessing salt intake on the basis of a "single dietary recall" was notoriously inaccurate.

Consensus Action on Salt and Hypertension, a group of scientists concerned with salt and its effects on health and which is led by Professor Graham MacGregor of St George's Hospital Medical School, said that there was "overwhelming evidence" that a high salt intake was a major cause of high blood pressure.

"Blood pressure is the most important predisposing factor to strokes and heart attacks, the commonest cause of death in the Western world."

The Committee on Medical Aspects of Nutrition Policy, set up to advise the Government, recommended in its report on heart disease that average salt intake in the UK should be reduced from nine grams to six grams a day.

Most salt is hidden in processed food and the scientists say that more must be done to reduce the salt content and to label it clearly in these foods.



Knit one, clone one, for woolly winner

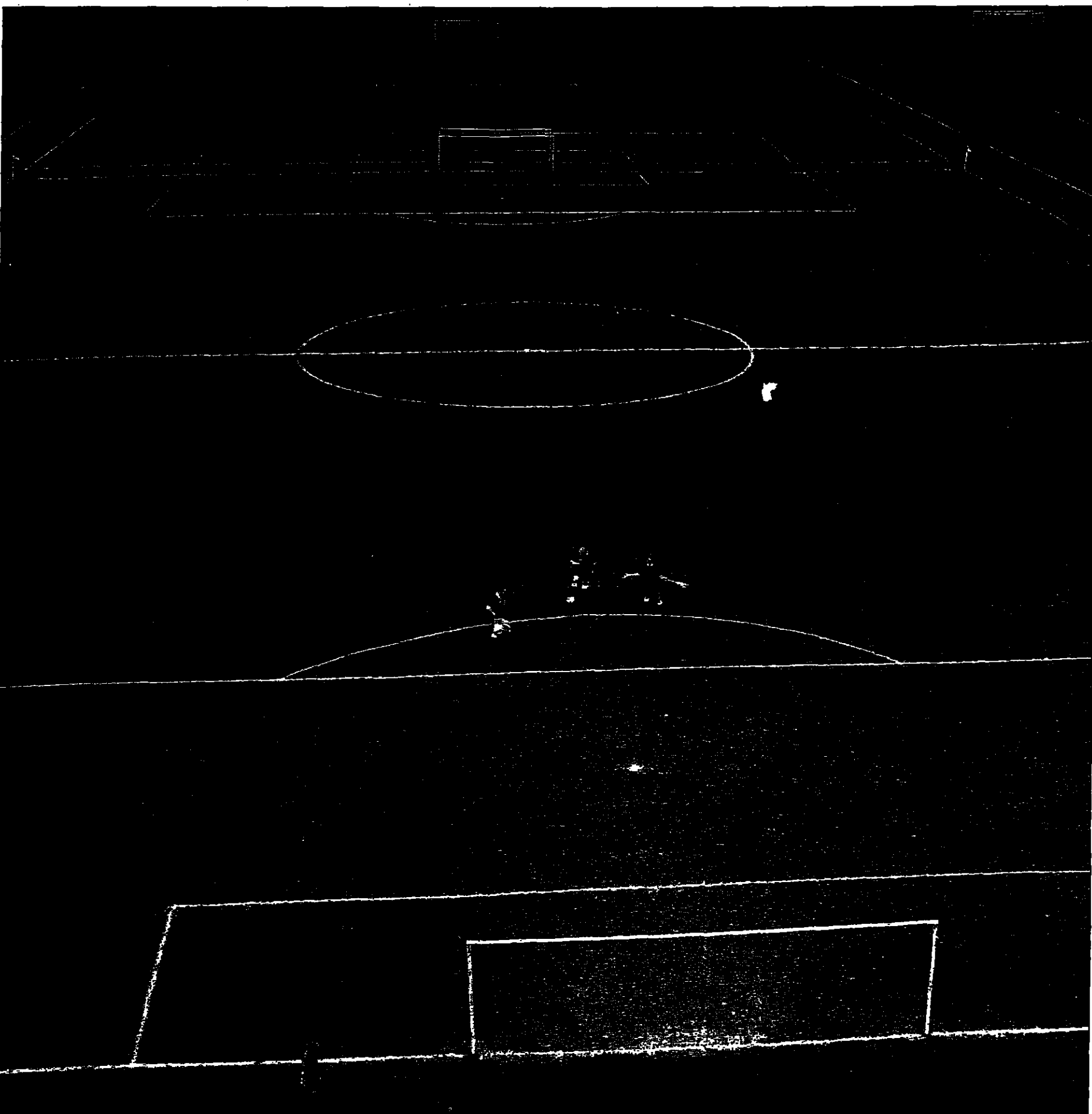
YOUNG designer Holly Wharton became a walking advert for National Science Week today when she donned a woolly jumper made from the fleece of Dolly, the cloned sheep.

Holly, 12, of Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, won a national competition to design the sweater which was donated to the Science Museum in London.

Actress Jenny Agutter, a carrier of the hereditary disease cystic fibrosis, said it was a great advert for the pioneering work of Dolly's creators and the Cystic Fibrosis Trust which helped organise the competition.

In future it may be possible to engineer cloned sheep which produce AAT, a protein used in the treatment of cystic fibrosis.

Holly's design featured two identical sheep happily grazing in a field and beat off patterns involving cable-knit in the form of DNA strands.



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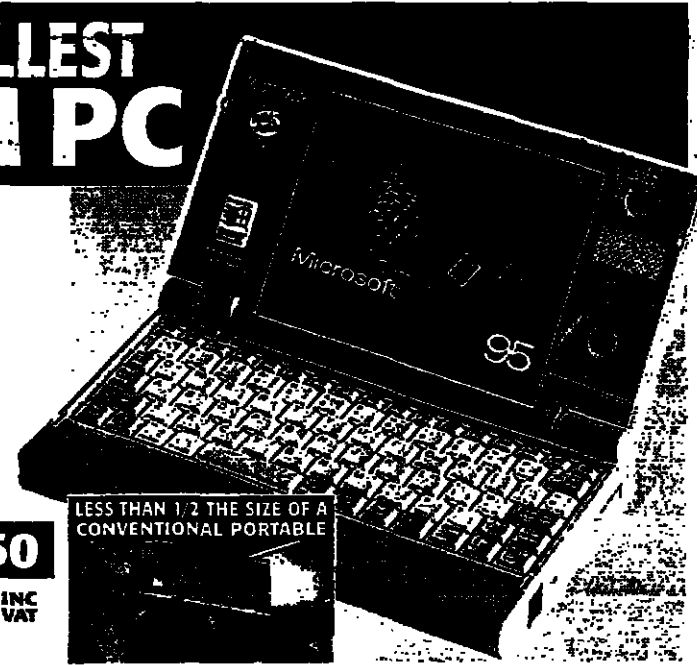
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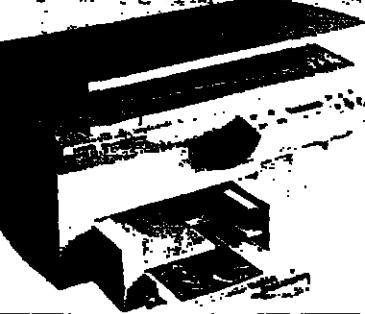
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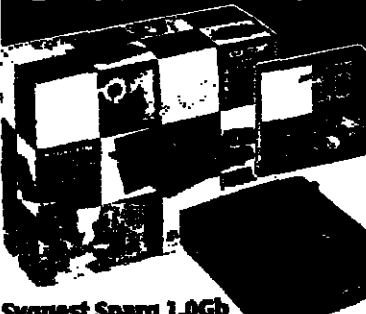
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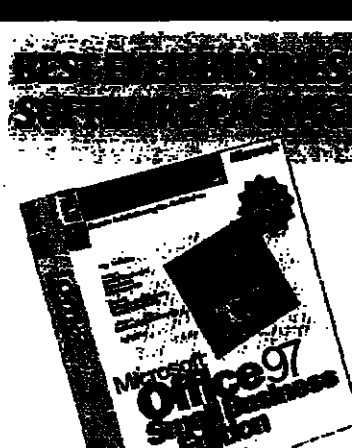
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PC WORLD

THE COMPUTER SUPERSTORE

First past the post is dead, says Ashdown

By Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

PADDY Ashdown yesterday predicted that a new voting system would be in place before the next election.

On the eve of his party's spring assembly in Southport, this weekend, the Liberal Democrat leader said: "Two years ago we were the third party of government at the local level in this country; now we're the second party."

But he then added in an interview with BBC Radio 4's 70-day programme that although the electoral system remained the same, "we shall change it at national level in the next three or four years, which will make our chances of growth and progress even better."

Given the size of the Government's majority, it is likely that Mr Blair will go for his full five-year term before he calls an election in 2002 - in which case Mr Ashdown appears to expect to have a new voting system in place for that poll.

But Labour's manifesto only promises a referendum - not enactment. It says: "We are committed to a referendum on the voting system for the House of Commons. An independent commission on voting systems will be appointed early to recommend a proportional alternative to the first-past-the-post system."

That commission has already been set up, under the chairmanship of Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, the former Labour Chancellor and ex-leader of the

Social Democratic Party, and is due to report later this year, but there has been no public commitment to early legislation.

Ten years after the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party merged, the party today debates a new strategy document, *No Glass Ceilings*, in which it is argued that there need be no limit to the party's aspirations. Certainly, Mr Ashdown sees no reason the Liberal Democrats should not at some point form a government.

Meanwhile, the policy paper says that "the strategy of constructive opposition" to Labour should be maintained.

In that vein, Malcolm Bruce, the party's Treasury spokesman, will tell the assembly this morning that Gordon Brown, Chan-

cellor of the Exchequer, should start spending some of the Government's £200bn "war-chest", helping to deliver Labour's pledges on health, education and crime.

But an article in the conference edition of the party magazine, *The Reformer*, says today that there is a danger: now that the Government is well on the way to delivering significant changes to the constitution, it could also satisfy demands for more investment in the public services - wiping out another Liberal Democrat demand.

In that case, the magazine says, the Liberal Democrats would need to carve out a distinctive policy stance on other issues, like education and environment policy, welfare reform, and Europe.

Crushing blow for tax dodgers



Flat fee: Baroness Hayman (below) witnessed what happens to vehicles that have no car tax. Photograph: Glynn Griffiths

TRANSPORT Minister Baroness Hayman unveiled a pyramid of 500 crushed cars today as a warning to road tax dodgers.

She launched a new Government crackdown on cheats - who are costing the Treasury £175 million a year - and showed what could happen if people did not pay up.

"Road tax dodgers cost the public tens of millions of pounds every year. And all too often the vehicles are not insured or MOT tested either."

"I think a lot of people resent the fact that while 95 per cent pay there are 5 per cent who don't."

The Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency's head officer

Haydn Madoc explained: "First a car without a disc is clamped and if no one gets in touch after 24 hours it's taken away. Then if it's not claimed after five weeks we either sell it at auction or if it's a good car or it's scrapped."

The DVLA's wheel-clamping scheme was launched only in London last August, but will go national this autumn.

Mr Madoc presented the Minister with a cheque for £4.4 million which has been raised by convincing dodgers in London to get their discs.

Baroness Hayman told a news conference in front of the 30ft mountain of metal at a police vehicle pound in Vauxhall, south London: "More than the



cars we've crushed, I'm most pleased with the money we've raised by convincing people to pay once we've caught them."

And she added: "I'm told that Post Offices in London ran

out of road tax application forms in the two weeks after the scheme was launched there."

In the early phase of the plan more than 2,000 vehicles were wheel-clamped. And more than 40,000 evaders voluntarily re-licensed their vehicles.

The latest scheme costs £5 million and Mr Madoc said they hoped to multiply the £4.4 million clawed back so far by at least four or five times. Tax disc offenders have to pay £68 to get their vehicles de-clamped or at least £135 to get them out of the pound. They also face storage fees of £12 a day.

Cheats also face prosecution of up to £1,000 for a car or motorcycle and up to £25,000 for a heavy goods vehicle.

Ban on diabetic drivers to stay

THE Government yesterday disclosed that it had checked and doubled checked medical advice over a ban on diabetics driving lorries or buses, as it faced pleas to ease enforcement of the rules.

Junior transport minister Baroness Hayman, speaking amid calls for a review of European Union rules which ban all from insulin-dependent diabetics driving such vehicles, pledged to investigate the regime in other EU states after concern that they were not implementing the measure as zealously as in Britain.

She told the House of Lords in a debate that the expert panel on diabetes was asked if those diabetics who had not suffered a hypoglycaemic attack - a collapse - could be categorised as not a road risk. But the panel's advice was that under modern treatment methods the risk of hypoglycaemia "are not eliminated and may even be increased rather than reduced".

She spoke of claims that insulin treatment could lead to hy-

poglycaemia, which in turn led to a loss of consciousness "without warning", and it was that which "poses the greatest risk on the road".

The minister said that faced with "clear and unequivocal" advice from the professionals, it was difficult to see how the Government could have rejected it.

She had no illusions about the strength of feeling among drivers who felt their own condition was under control and understood their concerns.

Lady Hayman said that in the last three months there had been 40 accidents involving collapse at the wheel by insulin-dependent diabetics. The risk of an insulin-dependent diabetic having a "hypo" attack was calculated at one in ten.

The advisory panel will meet at the end of April to consider representations from the British Diabetic Association and the Commons all-party group on diabetes on introducing an individual assessment programme for those affected by the rules.

Sinn Fein can stay - Mowlam

MO Mowlam, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, is not planning to take action to expel Sinn Fein from the Northern Ireland peace talks again despite the Government blaming IRA elements for another recent murder.

Sinn Fein is expected to be back in the Stormont talks on 23 March, following its suspension due to IRA involvement in two murders.

Despite Unionist calls for action, Ms Mowlam said yesterday that she did not plan a further Sinn Fein exclusion despite her security minister saying in a House of Commons written reply this week that he believed "IRA elements" were involved in a third murder - that of Co Antrim man Kevin Conway last month.

During a visit to Londonderry she said she had no conclusive evidence Mr Conway's murder was "IRA authorised".

Ms Mowlam said: "We took action against Sinn Fein on February 20 on everything that

had happened before that. Mr Conway was murdered on February 18. We took everything into account and Sinn Fein were excluded. We now, after a period of exclusion, invited them back in."

She said she had acted on the evidence available and she had no more conclusive evidence.

Pressed on whether she would take fresh action against Sinn Fein if she received conclusive evidence of IRA involvement in the Conway murder, she added: "I have no conclusive evidence to suggest that I will take action. I am indicating that I won't."

She said she had no conclusive evidence that the IRA ceasefire has broken. "All the evidence I have suggests it holds."

Her comments fuelled speculation that the IRA leadership has lost control of its north Armagh brigade - always one of the most militant - despite the insistence of the republican movement that it is totally behind the peace process.

صلى الله عليه وسلم

We use Shylock as a weapon against racism, say teachers



'The Merchant of Venice': many teachers think children should not be exposed to Shakespeare's play. Right: Dustin Hoffman as Shylock

By Ben Russell
Education Correspondent

ENGLISH teachers leapt to the defence of the Bard yesterday despite a survey which found teachers worldwide shunning *The Merchant of Venice* as anti-Semitic. In the survey of more than 1,000 teachers in Britain, Germany, Australia and the United States, 5 per cent thought the work about Shylock, a money-lender, should not be taught, while 40 per cent deemed the play anti-Semitic.

The survey was commissioned by the Globe Theatre, the replica of the house that staged Shakespeare's works, which is producing the play as part of its 1998 season.

The play, written in 1596, has been controversial for generations. It has prompted walk-outs and protests at productions in Israel and was suggested as one reason why the Bard's face was left off euro banknotes. However, it is firmly established in schools. It is



Richard Wilcocks, of Bruncliffe High School in Morley, near Leeds, teaches the play to 14-year-old GCSE pupils. He said: "It's a good opportunity to teach about anti-Semitism. They are very involved in the play and are learning a lot."

even used as an introduction to Shakespeare for children as young as 10.

Anne Barnes, general secretary of the National Association for the Teaching of English, said: "The play can be read and studied on different levels. It is true that the whole business of Shylock is complex and the area of Elizabethan anti-Semitism is odd to 20th-century readers. You have to be very confident about your ability to teach these issues of racism and prejudice, and you need to know your kids well."

The Globe is running a project to work on the play with south-east London schools. Alastair Tallon, of the theatre's education unit, said: "If we do not perform and teach the play, how do we deal with other people's prejudices? Racism is very much on the agenda because the British National Party and the National Front are strong in these areas and we hope schools use this to confront that."

St Saviour's and St Olave's School, a girls' school in Southwark, is participating in the project. The headteacher, Irene Bishop, said: "Young people are not stupid. They know there are racists around and just because there are racists in a play it does not mean we should not address the issues."

Police get powers to check sex offenders

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

POLICE will be able to use new powers to stop a threat to children by 150 sex offenders who are due to be released from custody without supervision over the next two years.

The public outcry at the disclosure that notorious paedophiles were due to be released by the Home Office and Downing Street yesterday led to a decision to release the public that action could be taken to protect children in certain areas such as schools and playgrounds.

Home Office sources last night confirmed that new orders could be imposed on sex offenders by chief constables, if they presented a threat to children.

As the Government faced mounting anger, a spokesman for the Prime Minister said: "The Government recognises the public concern about protecting children from paedophiles. The police and probation service have a role to play."

The police and the probation service expressed anxiety about the pending releases. But Downing Street said the police would be expected to use the powers in new legislation to tackle sex offenders, if they posed a threat to children. Extended supervision is part of the Crime and Disorder Bill, which should become law by the autumn.

There was confusion over the powers that will be available to the police after confirmation by Alun Michael, a Home Office minister, that the Government was powerless to stop the sex offenders being allowed out of custody without supervision.

"The law cannot turn the clock back and increase the punishment that was given at the time. I think the instincts of

everybody is that should happen," Mr. Michael said. But the Home Office source said: "It will be possible for a sex offender order to apply to these people."

It will allow offenders who demonstrate that they may be a danger to public to be returned to jail for up to six months. The Downing Street spokesman said police chief could apply for a sex offender order under the Bill if they believe the sex offender is behaving in a way that poses a threat. "They could stop known sex offenders from standing outside school gates, or going into a play ground."

But the spokesman added: "It is impossible to have retrospective legislation in this respect. You cannot apply additional punishments to people retrospectively when they have served their sentence."

Chris Hook, whose daughter Sophie was murdered by paedophile Howard Hughes, said dangerous sex offenders should never be allowed out of jail. He backed a system used in some American states where paedophiles are assessed for risk at the end of their sentence and if they are still judged to be dangerous, they are given an additional prison term.

Paul Cavadino, principal officer of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, said supervision of paedophiles after release was "crucial" to stop them reoffending.

The Crime and Disorder Bill should be amended so "sex offender orders" could include compulsory supervision, he said.

Barry MP Nicholas Winterton called for "urgent action" from the Home Secretary, Jack Straw. But the former Conservative prisons minister, Ann Widdecombe, said: "We should keep things in proportion."

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by Robin Robertson

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A metal that floats on water,
must be kept in kerosene,
can be drawn into wire.
(He who had jumped in the harbour,
burnt his hair off,
been caught hanging from the light.)
He'd heard it was once used
to make hydrogen bombs,
but now was a coolant for nuclear reactors,
so he broke out of hospital barefoot
and walked ten miles to meet me in the snow.

"Lithium" comes from Penguin Modern Poets 13 (Penguin, £7.99), which will be the last volume in this influential series. It contains a selection from the work of Michael Hofmann, Michael Longley and Robin Robertson, chosen by the poets themselves.

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Secrecy blamed for scale of BSE crisis

By Charles Arthur
Science Editor

A LEADING scientist will tell the BSE Inquiry next week that it might have been possible to prevent almost a quarter of the total cases of "mad cow disease" if the Government had not refused him access to its data.

Instead, the crisis caused by bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle cost the UK nearly £1bn in the year after March 1996, according to an independent report published yesterday. It found, though, that job losses and the impact on the economy were less severe than predicted, because of government subsidies and compensation, and a change in people's shopping habits.

On Monday, the BSE In-

quiry panel will hear evidence from Professor Roy Anderson of Oxford University, who has submitted written testimony that he was repeatedly rebuffed when he formally approached the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) from 1989 to 1991, offering to make an independent analysis of the BSE epidemic.

Professor Anderson runs a world-class group of scientists specialising in analysis of infectious epidemics, and says he was "somewhat frustrated" by MAFF's refusal to give him access to its BSE database.

If his techniques had been applied then they would have shown that the ministry's ban on feeding BSE-infected food to cows was failing, and allowed them to take appropriate action.

"The size of the epidemic would have been significantly smaller, by about a quarter of a million infected cattle," he says in his written submission to the inquiry.

When he was finally given access to the database, in June 1996, he calculated that a total of 1 million cattle had been infected with the disease, of which

only 160,000 cases were actually diagnosed.

Scientists now believe that the 24 deaths from "new variant" Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in Britain were caused by eating BSE-infected food. A spokesman for MAFF said the ministry would not comment on Professor Anderson's statement at this time: "We are going to let

the inquiry take its course. If there's criticism, people will have their chance to answer it."

Meanwhile, yesterday's report, *Economic Impact of BSE on the UK Economy*, said the UK beef industry suffered only modest falls in output and jobs between 1996 and 1997.

The report, commissioned by the previous government, esti-

mated that the net loss to the economy in the first 12 months after the onset of the BSE crisis was between £740m and £980m - substantially lower than earlier estimates, following a 36 per cent fall in demand for British beef and beef products. Early predictions of 46,000 job losses were substantially reduced by support to the food

industry. Instead, no more than 1,000 people lost their jobs in the 12 months after the BSE crisis broke in March 1996.

But Stephen Nicol, a co-author of the report, warned: "The future impacts of the BSE crisis, in job and income terms, on some sectors - particularly beef farmers, abattoirs and part of the marketing chain such as auction markets - are likely to be significantly greater than those impacts that had occurred up to the middle of 1997."

At that time, wholesalers, manufacturers, retailers and consumers switched to other UK meat products as an alternative to beef, expanding output and employment elsewhere in the UK economy, they said.

The authors estimated that the switch offset between a

half and two-thirds of the potential impact of the crisis on the economy. And the £1.5bn of subsidy and compensation payments to farmers, abattoirs and other food businesses did "largely compensate" for the loss of output.

Though abattoirs were hit hard - particularly by the loss of the export market - their profit margins actually rose, helped by compensation payments and a fall in cattle prices.

Meat processors received no compensation and were forced to switch to imported beef and to change their recipes - raising costs and depressing sales and profits.

Regionally, the biggest losers were in Northern Ireland, followed by Scotland, and parts of northern and south-west England.

Winners and losers

How the BSE crisis affected different groups and areas:

WINNERS

Retailers, manufacturers that could switch to non-beef products.
Renderers and abattoirs covered by government compensation.

schemes;
Inspection and compliance services;
Cold stores;
Dairy farms (in short term).

LOSERS

Specialist hauliers;
Specialist exporters of meat.

livestock and genetic material such as bull semen;
Specialist beef and mixed livestock farmers.

MIXED FORTUNES

Feedstuff suppliers;
Auction markets.

ACROSS THE UK

England: North, major loss; South West, significant loss; West Midlands, significant loss; North West, small loss; East Midlands, small loss; South East, neutral; Yorkshire & Humberside, net gain; East Anglia, large net gain; Scotland: major loss.



Ancien Régime: Monaco's Prince Rainier with his daughter, Princess Caroline

Photograph: Reuters

Upper crust toasts aristocrat studbook

THEY are the obscure, the exiled, the dispossessed. With the exception of a few notables, the glorious heyday of European and South American royalty is long past.

But at a ceremony on Monday in the suitably traditional upper-crust surroundings of Claridge's Hotel, London, the international *crème de la crème* will be able to raise a toast in their own honour once more.

Their pedigrees have been compiled for the first time in 54 years for a new edition of the 235-year-old *Almanac de Gotha*, which was once the social bible for the monarchies of the world.

The 671-page volume will be in English for the first time, as the authors believe the language has superseded French as the "traditional diplomatic tongue".

For the blue-blooded, the importance of the almanac should not be underestimated. When Princess Alexandra of Greece met her future husband,

The guidebook to European royalty has gone back into print, writes Louise Jury

King Peter II of Yugoslavia, she asked: "But how are we related?" It is claimed her mother responded with a copy of the book.

Royalty magazine observed this month: "The *Almanac de Gotha* ... is the last and undisputed word on who is who. The royal libraries of Europe have been stocked with its editions since 1763. It is the nearest thing to a trades union when it comes to settling questions or disputes." The almanac had been owned and published by the Perthes family of the tiny Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, until it became a nationalised asset of the former GDR.

In the wake of the reunification of Germany, the family, under Stephan Perthes, has resumed its various publishing interests, but decided against

updating 50 years of royal births and deaths itself.

Charlotte Pike, 38, a former *Burke's Peerage* researcher, and John Kennedy, 32, a former private secretary to Prince Michael of Kent, took over the task.

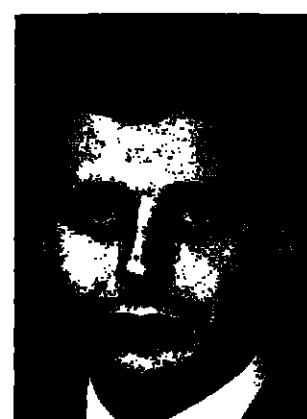
After half a century without publication, Prince Charles as well as his sons William and Harry, will be among the royals taking their place in the volume for the first time. Others will include Maya Flicke, the divorced wife of Mercedes heir Friedrich Flick, and her sister, Princess Gloria von Thurn und Taxis, dubbed the "Punk Princess". They are both members of the Schonburg-Glauchau family.

Belgrade-born John Kennedy may be regarded as having a personal interest. Described as a distant kinsman of the ex-

iled Yugoslav royal family, he helped arrange a high-profile visit to Belgrade by exiled members of the family in 1991.

In 1992, Mr Kennedy, who has stood for Parliament for the Conservatives, was hailed as the "Kissinger of Yugoslavia" by Radovan Karadzic, leader of the Bosnian Serbs, for his peace efforts in the Bosnian conflict.

Copies of the earlier editions of the almanac still exist. The central reference library in Westminster, London, has many volumes from between 1775 and 1941, although not the last, published in 1944. A spokesman said: "It is used, on and off, mainly for historical research. There's fascinating stuff in there."



John Kennedy: Author

Boy in train stabbing sent to Broadmoor

A TEENAGER was sent to Broadmoor high security hospital for mental health assessment yesterday after savagely knifing a young woman in the head while they were on a train. Robert Buckland, 18, of no fixed address, was convicted last January of the attempted murder of Alison Kennedy, 28. Ms Kennedy, a charity worker from Northern Ireland, was travelling in a deserted carriage to see her sister in Surrey in March last year when Buckland attacked her from behind, embedding a Bowie-style hunting knife deep into her skull.

Judge Geoffrey Grigson said at the Old Bailey in London yesterday that doctors were satisfied Buckland was suffering from mental illness and the condition was susceptible to treatment. He would therefore make an interim order that the 18-year-old should be examined at Broadmoor for a minimum of 12 weeks, before being sentenced. But he added: "Even with a de-

fendant as young as you, given the horrific nature of the crime, my prime duty is to protect the public."

Buckland had fantasized about knifing a woman in the head while still at school the court had been told. When he spotted Ms Kennedy sitting alone in a carriage, he had found his real-life victim. She is still suffering physical and psychological effects from the attack.

Judge Grigson told Buckland: "You should understand what ever conclusion the doctors come to, it is for the court to decide at the end of the day, whether such an order is a suitable means of dealing with you."

He had heard from Dr David Mawson, consultant psychiatrist at Broadmoor, that there was "much to be learned about the defendant - many important background details need to be researched ... We do not know yet the purpose, the motive behind the attack and the nature of the risk he poses to others."



Alison Kennedy and her attacker, Robert Buckland

Buckland had intended to kill Ms Kennedy. When she turned and rose from her seat, holding the knife in her hand, he ran away scared and tried to jump from the train, the court had been told during his trial. Ms Kennedy was left to stagger along the train for help with the five-inch blade still in her skull. Although she will never fully recover, Ms Kennedy now hopes she can get on with her life. Immediately after Buckland's trial, she said she felt "a great sense of relief at the result and a great sense of satisfaction to be here to see it for myself". She said she thought she was going to die in the attack. She had worked in London as an

arts festival co-ordinator after obtaining a degree in arts and design and completing a post-graduate course in sculpture. She returned to work for the Multiple Sclerosis Society in Northern Ireland as an education officer last year and was described as "a dedicated and forward planning young person". Buckland had left home at 16 after trouble with his step-mother but by March last year he was fed up with sleeping rough. He was on his way to Guildford to seek a bed for the night when he spotted Ms Kennedy. He had admitted wounding her with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, but denied attempted murder.

Cricket official in abortion row apology

THE ENGLAND cricket official at the centre of this week's industrial tribunal abortion row, apologised yesterday for his part in the controversy.

Nick Marriner's apology followed a tribunal ruling that former Lord's receptionist Theresa Harild, with whom he had a brief affair, was the victim of sex discrimination. Ms Harild claimed Mr Marriner hounded her into having an abortion, complaining that he was too young to be a father.

Mr Marriner, 25, returned to work yesterday at Lord's Cricket Ground, where he has been employed for over two years as a development executive for the

England and Wales Cricket Board. In a brief statement he said: "I am deeply sorry for the part that I played in this unfortunate episode. I would like to make it absolutely clear that it was me that paid for Theresa Harild's abortion and not the ECB."

"I have worked with cricket for two-and-a-half years and I thoroughly enjoy my job assisting with the development of the game. I now want to put all this behind me."

The tribunal was told that Mr Marriner refused to discuss the pregnancy with his former girlfriend and asked Sarah Bladon, marketing secretary



Theresa Harild: Pressured

with the ECB, to persuade her to have a termination. Ms Harild says she was handed £400 in a brown envelope and told to

abort the child - which she wanted to keep.

On Wednesday, Ms Harild, 32, won a claim for sexual discrimination after a panel at the central London tribunal accepted that she had been pressured into having an abortion and was unlawfully dismissed.

The England and Wales Cricket Board could now be ordered to pay her £10,000 compensation. Tim Lamb, the board's chief executive, has maintained that the board acted sympathetically to Ms Harild's personal position and said many of the allegations made against it had been "hurtful".

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Cardiff takes prize in tale of two cities

By Kim Sengupta

THE LONG wait to discover the site of the National Assembly for Wales ended yesterday with victory for Cardiff, and disappointment for the other contender, Swansea.

The precise location of the building will be decided by a design competition between two sites in the city, on the Cardiff Bay waterfront and

Bute Square, near Cardiff Central railway station.

Ron Davies, the Secretary of State for Wales, said battle for the assembly had been "a tale of two cities", but the case for it to be sited in the Welsh capital was just too compelling.

"In making this decision, I am mindful that Wales has invested 40 years in promoting Cardiff as our capital city. We are a small country and must

build upon our achievement to date.

"Cardiff is established now not only as the capital of Wales, but as a leading administrative and financial centre which this year will host the European summit and, in 1999, the Rugby World Cup."

Civic leaders in Swansea had complained that Cardiff seemed always to get preferential treatment, and making

their city the home of the assembly could have rectified this imbalance.

Mike Hedges, leader of the Swansea council, insisted the choice of Cardiff would cost the taxpayer more. The Swansea Guildhall had been offered for £3m, he said. "The Cardiff option will have to be done within £17m, that's the government limit, but we will have to wait and see what the

cost is going to be when everything is built.

"It's great disappointment that we lost and I am sure that Russell Goodway, the leader of Cardiff council, will have a big smile on his face... We have proved at least that Swansea is deserving of more investment, it would be nice to be getting the £43m year by year that Cardiff Bay is getting."

The Swansea bid had been supported by a petition signed by 120,000 people including Welsh celebrities like Sir Harry Secombe, the actress Catherine Zeta Jones, and West Ham footballer John Hartson.

The Welsh Office had been negotiating with Cardiff council over the possible purchase of the elegant Edwardian City Hall for the assembly.

This broke down, however, when Labour councillors re-

fused the Government's offer of £3.5m and demanded £14.5m to take into account the cost of transferring council staff to other offices in the city.

Announcing the competition, Mr Davies said it was essential that Wales looked forwards, not backwards.

"I want this new building to be a symbol of our new democracy as we go forward with confidence into the next

millennium. The new landmark will capture the imagination of the people of Wales."

The assembly headquarters is scheduled to be finished by May 2000, and Mr Davies insisted, the £17m ceiling will be strictly adhered to. In the meantime, the first meeting of the 60-member assembly will take place in the University of Wales Court Building following elections next May.

Aerodynamic handbag launches Chanel into next millennium



By Tamsin Blanchard
in Paris

IT WAS NOT so much of a fashion show yesterday at Chanel in Paris, but a bag show. The sloppy tweed suits and cloche hats made some of the models look like bag ladies, but the big talking point of the show was the New Chanel Bag.

It is not quilted, and it does not have a gold chain. Instead, it is a hard brute of an object that resembles an aeroplane headrest. According to Karl Lagerfeld, the bag is aerodynamic and designed to take the house into the next millennium. Its name? The 2005. It looks so odd that it might take customers longer than that to get used to it: "It's totally new age," he said. "I have never seen anything like it."

The inspiration for the bag was the female torso, turned upside down, although for the pear-shaped Briton, it looks like the area between waist and bottom. The right way up, it has two



Yesterday in Paris: Above left, Chanel's 2005 superbag on the catwalk. Above, Vivienne Westwood with models at the end of her '98/99 show. Photographs: Ben Elmes/Jack Dabagian

breasts and a small waist. Like some sort of NASA spacecraft, it has been cloaked in strict secrecy for the past year. It is supposed to be "body friendly", featherlight and made to hug any part of the body. According to the designer himself, "you could use it as a pillow on an aeroplane".

The battle for the lucrative bag market is fierce now that Louis Vuitton has a slick new designer providing a collection of peartised blue and peach handbags and wrist bags, and Hermes has the *avant garde*, hipper-than-hip designer, Martin Margiela, to pump up sales of the Kelly bag.

Two other leatherware companies, Celine and Loewe, join the fray this weekend with brand new American designers to give their bag sales a boost. Michael Kors shows his collection for Celine today, and Narciso Rodriguez presents the first clothing collection for Loewe on Sunday.

The handbag has become more of a status symbol than it ever was in the Eighties; there are women who will join waiting lists for the sake of a £5,500 crocodile handbag by Dior.

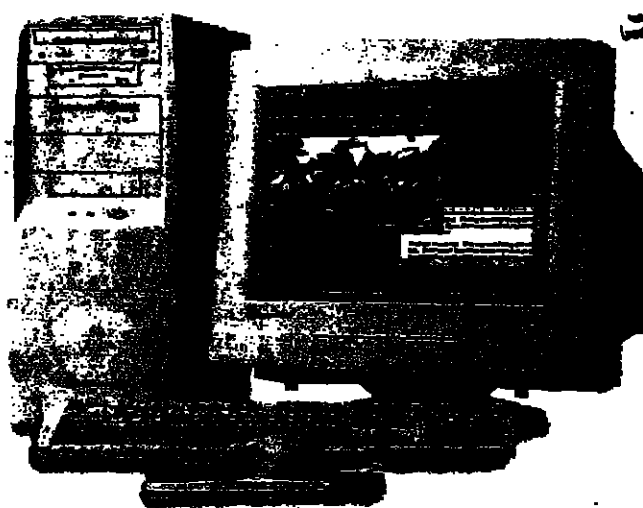
The 2005 will take some getting used to. But the superbag will certainly give

Chanel's sales a new lease of life, while the clothes for autumn/winter '98/99 look a tad dowdy. There is a shop in Paris called Didier Ludot that specialises in vintage Chanel, and this collection would not have looked out of place there. The doche hats gave the tweed suits and oversized iridescent pearls worn around the neck a tired and dated look.

Meanwhile, the people who specialise in counterfeit goods will be running up their own versions of the 2005 to be available at a market stall near you soon.

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Colleges need 25,000 places for childcare

By Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

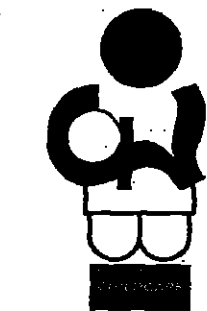
FURTHER education needs at least 25,000 new childcare places if it is to meet the demand from students according to the latest survey.

Some colleges believe they could fill their places three times over if they were to cut childcare fees and advertise places more widely says FE Now, the magazine for the further education sector.

Almost two-thirds of colleges say that if they increased the childcare they provide they could recruit more students and prevent more of them dropping out. No one knows the exact amount of childcare places provided by further education, although the Further Education Funding Council allocates £3m to 13,000 students. However some colleges use their general funds to spend more.

The Daycare Trust is planning a national audit of childcare in further and higher education. It is expected to lead to a database of all college childcare provision and a telephone hotline for parents seeking places by the year 2000.

The FE Now survey of 150 colleges found wide discrepancy in the number of places offered by establishments. One in four colleges have no childcare places at all. Some colleges have childcare places for one in



20 students others have one place for one student in 400. Overall, colleges feel that there is an immediate demand for a 50 per cent increase in childcare. More than a third only offer places for children over two years old which is likely to be because of the extra staff and space needed for younger children. Some 45 per cent of colleges did have places for six-month-old babies whereas only 30 per cent had places for babies from three months.

Cost is the crucial factor for many students, because at present they cannot claim for help if they are in full time education.

"If you offer a course for free to people on benefit," says Peter Prior, student services manager at Swindon College, "but then charge £1.25 an hour then you have put it out of their reach again. We wouldn't dare advertise free childcare because we know the demand would be overwhelming."

Colour match: A model wearing Kenzo's red ensemble with embroidered coat and top in his 1998/99 autumn/winter show in Paris yesterday. Photograph: Remy de la Mauvins

Publicity is off the menu for Hirst

By Jeremy Laurence
Health Editor

DAMIEN HIRST, the artist turned restaurateur, has been denied what promised to be a publicity coup for his fashionable eatery in Notting Hill, west London.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society has dropped its threat to prosecute the restaurant, Pharmacy, which masquerades as a chemists shop. The society said the restaurant had "knowingly flouted the law" by adopting the name Pharmacy which is a criminal offence under the Medicines Act 1968.

It had reluctantly decided to defer prosecution because "no penalty is available at present that is likely to deter the owners from using the name." The maximum fine under the act is £1,000 - a fraction of what the publicity caused by such a case would have been worth.

Charles Pullan, manager of the £1.5 million restaurant whose shelves of medicines have been confusing shoppers trying to get their prescriptions filled, said he was disappointed. "We are very upset. It was quite an exciting, fun thing going on in the background. We never thought the the Royal Pharmaceutical Society would get very far."

John Ferguson, secretary of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said the council was seeking an urgent meeting with the health department. He said: "There is a serious issue here. Parliament restricted the title 'pharmacy' so that, when people need medicines they know where to get a professional service and are protected from unscrupulous practices and dubious products. The council is determined to find a way to resolve this issue."

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Will the Gaullists deal with the Devil?

The French centre-right is tempted to negotiate with Le Pen. John Lichfield, in Vitrolles, asks whether the moderates will sell their souls

PORTENTOUS choral music. Flashing red, white and blue lights. Dramatic hush. Everyone looks to the right of the auditorium. The Great Man, asserting his greatness, strides in from the left, flanked by his bodyguards in jump-suits. Thunderous applause, rhythmic chanting, dancing in the aisles.

The Great Man is a short, balding, effeminate figure in a blue suit and a colourful tie; he looks like a young Hercule Poirot, at once compelling and slightly absurd. He is Bruno Mégret, the second power (and rising) on the French far-right. He gives an effective speech, full of the usual mockery and paranoia and coded racism of the National Front. His central message - before tomorrow's regional and local elections - is "everything is going our way".

The sub-text is: "everything is going my way." The most obvious victors in tomorrow's elections, covering 22 French regions and 96 départements, plus overseas territories, will be the Left. Ten months after coming to power in a general election, the Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, should be able to claim victory in 17 out of the 22 regional contests.

In the last poll of its kind, in 1992, the Left was flattened: the centre-right parties won in 20 regions, foreshadowing their crushing victory in the parliamentary election the following year. Mitterrandism was dead, said the pundits; the Left was



Bad dream team: Catherine and Bruno Mégret waving to the crowds as they arrive in Vitrolles for a National Front campaign meeting. The success of Jean-Marie Le Pen's extremist party has split the right-wing vote across France, allowing the Socialists to gain victory after victory

Photograph: Reuters

Whatever its internal difficulties, the NF now sprawls across enough political territory to make life difficult for the traditional Right. This is frustrating for the grass-roots and, increasingly, a temptation.

Throughout this campaign, there have been angry centre-right noises demanding freedom to make deals with the NF after the election. These voices, especially strident in the Ile-de-France and here in the Midi, have been shouted down by the party leadership, which insist that the NF is beyond the moral and political pale.

At his final rally in Vitrolles, Mr Mégret predicted that this position would become untenable: he said many centre-right regional councillors would, in a close vote, support the NF not the Left. Hence his comment: "We have not yet won the electoral battle but we have already won the political battle... everything is going our way."

The traditional right may, or may not, keep its members in line this time. But this issue - to fraternise or not with the NF - will remain the most important and destructive issue in French party politics into the next century. Much will depend on the rise of Mr Mégret. Although allegedly even more extreme in his private views than Mr Le Pen, he is regarded, and regards himself, as the man who could pull the whole of the French anti-Left together and reposition it sharply to the right.

out of power for a generation. But six years later the Socialists, and their Communist and Green allies, are on the point of taking over virtually all the levers of national and regional political power in France.

The only significant exception is the presidency, held by Jacques Chirac, the Gaullist, until 2002. But even Mr Chirac's stronghold is predicted to disappear beneath the pink-red-green tide. The Ile-de-France, the greater Paris area, has been the political and financial playground of Mr Chirac's RPR party for 26 years: tomorrow it is likely to fall to the Left.

The predicted success of the Socialists and their allies is a tribute to the skill of Mr Jospin in finessing budgetary problems and keeping his troublesome alliance together. It is also a symptom of a rising economic barometer in France. It owes something, equally, to the incompetence of the centre-right parties, who have run a woefully flat and empty campaign. President Chirac's popularity is soaring with the economy but his friends and fraternal enemies on the centre-right remain bereft of ideas, leadership and fresh faces.

It does not take a mathematician's genius, however, to work out that there is another, darker, explanation for the Left's likely success. The National Front is predicted to gain its highest ever score - 16 per cent - in regional elections. In 15 of the 17 regions in which the Left will top the poll, the NF will hold the balance of power.

In this region - Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur - there is a close, three-horse race and an outside chance that the National Front will top the poll. This could - although it is unlikely - make Jean-Marie Le Pen the regional president.

In other words, a majority of voters in almost all French re-

gions will vote for right-wing parties tomorrow, but the vote will be split between traditional right and far right and the left-wing coalition will win the elections.

The leaders of the centre-right parties are refusing adamantly to work with the National Front, which is almost the only thing to their credit. They will therefore have to work with left-wing minority regional governments all over France.

Something similar happened in the parliamentary elections last year. Mr Jospin owes his majority in the National Assembly to the success of the NF in splitting the anti-Left vote.

Gauging the real or potential strength of the Far Right in France is a difficult business; there are many reasons to believe, and hope, that the National Front may have reached its high-water mark. Disapproval of the NF remains huge (well over 70 per cent). The economy is recovering. Jean-Marie Le Pen faces more dissonance within the party than ever before. He has run a poor, and lazy, campaign for the presidency of the Greater Provence region. Despite the closeness of the polls, he has made no appearance in the South in the last week. As usual, he prefers to distance himself from possible failure, rather than fight for victory.

This compares sharply with the tireless efforts of his Number Two and undeclared rival, Bruno Mégret, who has been working the ground in the Bouches-de-Rhône (greater Marseilles) area for months. The victory last year of his wife, Catherine, in the mayoral election in Vitrolles, in the northern outer suburbs of Marseilles, makes Mégret a greater hero in these parts than Le Pen. The name of the NF leader was scarcely mentioned at the party's last big regional rally.

Milosevic rules out chance of UN mediation in Kosovo

By Andrew Gumbel

GOVERNMENT leaders in Belgrade firmly rejected any international mediation to solve the crisis in Kosovo yesterday, saying they were ready to open dialogue with leaders of the province's Albanian majority population at any time but that Kosovo's status was strictly a Serbian internal matter.

With time running out for President Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia to meet international demands for a settlement to the Kosovo issue, he appeared to have adopted a strategy of temporary detente towards the Albanians combined with a vigorous refusal to let the outside world dictate terms for him.

A demonstration staged by more than 50,000 students and other young Albanians in Kosovo's capital, Pristina, passed off without so much as a glimpse of a Serb policeman - the second time this week that the Serbs have held back from their usual practice of breaking up demonstrations with overwhelming force.

At the same time, a Serbian government negotiating team, led by the deputy prime minister, Ratko Markovic, waited in



Slobodan Milosevic faces new UN pressure

Pristina for a second day on the off-chance that Albanian leaders would accept their invitation to talk to them. The Albanians, backed by the US state department, denounced Mr Markovic's delegation as a piece of propaganda aimed at scoring points, not opening a genuine dialogue.

"It looked like a veritable carnival - it was not an invitation for talks, but an attempt to undermine them," said Fehmi Agani, deputy leader of the LDK, the main Albanian party in Kosovo. The Albanians said it was impossible to consider negotiations while paramilitary police were still

clustered thickly around a number of villages in the Drenica region - site of two onslaughts by Serbian forces in the last two weeks in which more than 80 Albanians perished.

The six-nation Contact Group, which met in London on Monday, issued a number of conditions for President Milosevic to fulfil on pain of further international sanctions, including acceptance of a European fact-finding mission and initiation of a "meaningful dialogue" without preconditions.

Yesterday, however, as the Council of Europe's parliamentary council leader Lemi Fischer visited Belgrade for talks with Mr Milosevic, the Serbs said they would not accept the mission. They also laid down specific conditions for talks - namely, that any solution for Kosovo would have to be found within Serbia's borders.

Like Belgrade, western governments have rejected the notion of independence for Kosovo, but they have not ruled out converting it into a full republic in Yugoslavia alongside Serbia and Montenegro.

The Contact Group will meet again on March 25 to decide whether Mr Milosevic's attitude merits the imposition of

economic sanctions. According to diplomatic sources, NATO and the major powers are seriously considering the creation of a military cordon sanitaire around Yugoslavia - including NATO troops in northern Albania, the expansion of the UN military mission in Macedonia, a troop presence in Bulgaria and a naval monitoring mission off the coast of Montenegro.

Pressure is also mounting on Kosovo's Albanian leadership to renounce its dreams of independence. Western governments fear an independent Kosovo would only exacerbate tensions with Belgrade, and might tempt parts of Macedonia and even Montenegro to secede from their respective states and join a nascent Greater Albania.

The LDK will have great difficulty in dropping its independence demand, however, as that is the plank on which its support is built.

One European foreign affairs minister, Piero Fassino of Italy, said yesterday that both sides would have to relax their intransigent attitudes if any solution were to be found. For the moment, the chances of that look slim.

Serbia told proposals 'not good enough'

The European Union yesterday gave the coolest of welcomes to the latest offer of President Slobodan Milosevic to the insurgent ethnic Albanian minority in Kosovo, making clear it would not be enough to reverse the sanctions imposed in London against Yugoslavia by leading international powers, writes Rupert Corwell.

Mr Milosevic's proposals were "not good enough", Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary said, indicating that Europe entirely sympathised with the Albanian majority in the province who refused to meet a delegation

from Belgrade this week, dismissing the exercise as little more than a publicity stunt.

Last night EU foreign ministers at their informal meeting were exploring possible solutions, involving some kind of special status for the province, but within the borders of the existing rump Yugoslavia. As a German official put it, "there must be more autonomy, but we must have outright separation."

Europe is adamant the isolation of Belgrade will continue failing a genuine move towards a political solution to the crisis by Mr Milosevic, and

Mr Cook was confident that the tighter economic squeeze imposed by the six-nation Contact Group on Monday will bite - and bite quickly.

According to the Foreign Secretary, the regime had been "stunned" by the speed of Western reaction, and was especially alarmed by the suspension of financial support for Yugoslavia's privatisation programme. "If they can't sell their (privatisation) bonds, they cannot finance their deficit."

Meanwhile, the foreign ministers delivered an unexpectedly blunt warning to President

Subarto that acceptance of the International Monetary Fund's stabilisation plan offered the escape from Indonesia's financial turmoil.

With its refusal to comply with the initial IMF recommendations, the country was "entering uncharted waters," Derek Fitchett, Minister of State at the Foreign Office said, underlining the risk that failure to deal with Indonesia risked undoing all the good work done by Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea in tackling their own financial crises.

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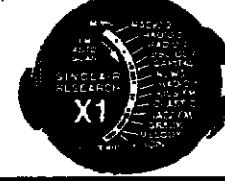
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Crazy daze for inmates of New York, the world's biggest asylum

To be in New York is to be an inmate in the world's biggest asylum. There is never any peace, day or night. Even here in *The Independent's* midtown office, 21 floors up and behind double-glazed windows, there is no escaping the racket. Right now, police sirens are wailing as if Armageddon has come.

The cacophony of New York is part of what gives it its energy, of course. And energy is the whole point of this city. But sometimes, just sometimes, when your batteries are low and your nerves are ragged, it can

NEW YORK DIARY



David Usborne

all get too much. One especially loud car horn is suddenly more than your brain can bear. Get

me out of here, you want to scream. No wonder friends are turning their attention to securing a rental out of town. Flee to the mountains, the Hamptons, even New Jersey, before migraine sets in.

Even if you pay attention only very slightly, it is hard not to conclude that a goodly portion of your fellow travellers on this city's pavements are a dime short of a dollar. Some are obviously loopy, other merely eccentric, but it is all the raving that worries me most.

It is not just people cursing at telephones that won't take

their quarters or at taxi-cabs cutting them down as they try to cross the street. So many people in New York seem so consumed with anger or frustration about something they simply cannot help accosting complete strangers to tell them about it.

It happened to me one day last week as I was trying to buy a sandwich just across from the United Nations. The guy came in the door like a torpedo, screeched to a halt behind my left shoulder and proceeded to exhort me for not rising up against basically everyone but especially against the police

department and the corrupt crooks running the UN. Lordy, as if ordering the inmates of a New York sandwich wasn't already brain-tanking enough without this in my ear. I ignored him first, then I wanted to smash his head in with the gherkin bottle behind the counter. Finally, he left and I just felt depressed.

Eddie Izzard, whom I vaguely know from school, thought I might be the one about to get hit when I asked his advice at a party thrown recently at Sotheby's for the Broadway premiere of *Art*,

the three-handed play that is still packing them in the West End. Across the room stood none other than Sean Connery, attending as co-producer and holder of the film rights. Eddie knows Connery from the set of the upcoming *Average* film. Did I dare go up and ask him to comment on the brouhaha surrounding his knighthood – or rather his non-knighthood? Eddie's reply suggested that if I did, I might get biffed. I tried anyway, assuming Eddie was joking, and Connery was gruff but entirely polite. And, no, he would not comment.

Yasmina Reza, who wrote *Art*, is regretting talking that night to *Newsweek*. The magazine quoted her saying she was fed up with her own country, France, because no producers in Paris showed interest in the play or three others she has written and has turned on her for staging the last two in commercial theatres instead of state-subsidised houses.

"The French mentality is to keep it small," she was cited as saying. "If you have ambition, you are considered egocentric. I got no help with *Art*."

Unfortunately, the comments were reported from here by the French newspaper *Le Monde*. Reza went ballistic, claiming she had been misquoted, and demanded that an apology be printed. Why she thought *Le Monde* was at fault is not clear.

It seems there is an explanation for the explosion of police sirens twenty-one floors below my office window. The local branch of the Chase Manhattan bank is, as I write, in the midst of a hold-up, gunshots and all. Ah, New York. Got to love it.

America returns to the corner shop

The US love affair with the mall may be over, writes Mary Dejevsky, in Washington

DRIVE north west out of central Washington and you soon enter a woman's land of glass and marble walls, the first wave of suburban malls that line the freeway exits from the US capital. In a few months, though, some of those walls will start crashing down, felled in the name of bringing a more human scale to the great American shopping experience.

The doomed walls belong to the Mazza Gallerie, a vast cuboid building. Inside, though you would hardly know to look at from the road, are two department stores – the up-market Neiman Marcus and the downmarket Filene's Basement – a selection of speciality shops and plenty of empty premises.

The walls make Mazza Gallerie a fortress: secure and air conditioned, but hardly somewhere to pop into for a loaf of bread or a bag of jelly beans.

Now, it has been bought by a much-praised Chicago developer, Dan McCaffery, and is to be made over, starting with the removal of its most distinctive feature: the daunting outside walls. According to Mr McCaffery, the main aim is to make the shopping facilities more visible and accessible.

In effect, the enclosed shopping centre is to be turned inside out and made to face the streets. The individual shops will be made to appeal to passers-by and local residents, not just to car-borne shoppers with several hours at their disposal. The shops should, in Mr McCaffery's words, be "people-friendly" and foster a sense of community.

If Mazza Gallerie, built in the Seventies, were the only enclosed shopping centre being subjected to this



American Pie: Wallace Heggstad, the last grocer in the town of Wilson, Minnesota, who shut up shop 14 years ago

late Nineties makeover, that could be put down to the ambitions of one developer and the eternal American quest for something new. In fact, though, it is just one of a dozen or more indoor complexes that have been, or are about to be, shorn of their walls in a process that is being dubbed the "de-malling" of America. Nor is it limited to relatively prosperous suburban districts, like Friendship Heights in Washington,

where the Mazza Gallerie is located. A similar project has just been started across the city, in the depressed area south west of the centre.

Here, the Waterside Mall, a giant shopping and office complex built 30 years ago, obliterating the existing grid layout of the streets and chopping the district in two, is itself to be chopped up into more manageable pieces. The street grid is to

be restored, and the walls demolished. Similar operations have already been completed in two other suburbs of Washington, outside Chicago, and in California and Florida.

Taking their cue from the successful revivals of Manhattan and central Chicago, where lower crime rates have been accompanied by a surge of investment and the revival of city living, developers are sensing

a change in customers' taste and priorities. The trend in new out-of-town shopping centres is for a return to open complexes, where shops front on to the main road and circle around a giant car park. There are signs, too, still small and hesitant, that stores may be starting to move back into some of the towns and cities they left 30 years ago. And when they do move back, as in central Chicago, they face outwards, beckoning their

customers, allowing them to linger on the pavement.

Transforming fortress malls into people-friendly shopping streets and squares is not an easy task. But it is evidence, along with the nostalgic resort to words like "liveable" and "community", that the strict separation of housing and commerce which leaves so much of American suburbia without a heart may be an idea whose time is passing.

Washington cries foul over JFK mementoes

By David Usborne

An auction of John F Kennedy memorabilia in New York next week is certain to arouse keen interest – after all, the Kennedys are the nearest thing America has to a royal family. But as the 600-odd lots were unveiled yesterday, a hitch had arisen. Should some of them be on sale at all?

Among the hordes milling through Guernsey's, a small New York auction house, were men and women in suits from Washington. Their mission: to retrieve a number of items that officials believe belong to the nation.

The catalogue includes JFK's presidential yacht, *Honey Fitz*, which alone could fetch several million dollars, as well as his sailing boat *Flash II*. It also features a large number of items gathered by his White House secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, after his assassination. She died in 1995 and bequeathed her collection to a friend, Robert White, who hopes to build a museum from the sale's proceeds to house those mementoes he is not putting into the sale.

But Ms Lincoln may not have been entitled to all of what she laid her hands on. Yesterday, the National Archives started negotiating to have some lots withdrawn, including Kennedy's inauguration speech, a drop-leaf signing table, notes and correspondence on the Cuban crisis, a report to the nation about the 1961 Berlin crisis and the portable record player that the President took almost everywhere on his travels.

Members of the Kennedy family have also approached Guernsey's with worries about ownership. John F Kennedy Jr is believed to want some items given back to the family. Guernsey's head, Arlen Ettinger, appears unimpressed. "The Kennedy's have money. They can come and bid on anything they want," she remarked.

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Cancer in retreat: cases drop and fewer lives are lost in US

By David Usborne
in New York

IN A FIRST unmistakable sign that both new therapies and changes in lifestyle are having a beneficial impact, the numbers of cases of cancer have begun to retreat in the United States, as have the numbers of deaths from the disease.

"Cancer is conquerable and progress is being made," Dr James Marks of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said, unveiling the most recent report on cancer in the US. "The burden of public fear should begin to lift."

It is the first time that cancer, which still kills 1,500 Americans each day, has been in retreat na-

tionwide since records of the disease were first compiled in the Thirties. Overall, the report shows, the incidence of cancer cases fell by 0.7 per cent per year between 1990 and 1995. Deaths from cancer over the period fell by an average of 0.5 per cent.

The picture, nonetheless, is uneven, both as between different kinds of cancer and as between dif-

ferent segments of the population. The statistics are less hopeful for disadvantaged people and for African-Americans, particularly men.

Experts pointed to increased education about the hazards of tobacco in explaining an average annual 1.1 per cent drop in lung-cancer cases. More generally, credit is given to much increased screening, for instance for

breast tumours in women, and new forms of treatment. Breast-cancer rates have apparently levelled out after climbing rapidly for two decades.

The sharpest drop was reported in colon and rectum cancer, where cases dropped an average of 2.3 per cent. Mouth and throat cancer was down by 1.8 per cent annually and leukaemias showed a 1.0 per cent

drop. By contrast, the incidence of melanomas, or skin cancer, rose during by an average of 2.5 per cent.

The data is bleakest, however, for black men, who have the highest cancer incidence rate of any group in the country and for whom rates are still climbing. This is caused particularly by growing numbers of cases of prostate cancer. "Some segments [of

the population] have not benefited equally," observed John Seffrin, of the American Cancer Society.

According to the society, one in four deaths in the US are caused by cancer. More than half a million Americans are expected to die from some form of cancer this year. One in two American men can expect to develop cancer in their lifetime.

Hindu nationalist chief left in limbo as electoral alliance falls to pieces

By Peter Popham
in Lucknow

AB Vajpayee, parliamentary leader of the Hindu nationalist BJP, should by now be packing his bags ready for removal to 7 Race Course Road, the prime minister's official residence. Instead he is twisting in the wind.

He has two big problems. The first and most urgent is that a crucial ally in the south, the former film star Jayalalitha, who faces serious corruption charges after her term as chief minister of Tamil Nadu, refuses to back him. It was said that she wanted her proxies to be the ministers of finance and law; alternatively, that she wanted the dismissal of her deadly rival who now runs the southern state. Whatever it was, Mr Vajpayee refused to grant it, and Jayalalitha pulled her 27 MPs. He was left well short of a majority.

Last night the head of state, President KR Narayanan, met leaders of the other main groupings, Congress, the United Front (UF) and the two main communist parties, to see if they had any bright ideas. But as both Congress and the UF are effectively leaderless, and as it was their latest quarrel which brought on the recent, unwelcome election, no one was optimistic.

Mr Vajpayee's immediate problem stems from the treachery of a dubious ally. But his other problem is more fundamental: he has proved unable, after nearly 50 years of trying, to amass the sort of broad national support that the Congress Party used to be able to take for granted. The disputed religious site in Ayodhya, symbol of India and the world's doubts about Mr Vajpayee's party, continues to haunt him.

The BJP overflows with patriotic emotion; it stands for India strong, self-confident and with nuclear missiles targeting Peking. But in its heart of hearts India doesn't buy it. Ayodhya explains why not.

It is a small town in the fertile plains of Uttar Pradesh, east of Lucknow in the north of the country. To call it dilapidated would be a kindness: it looks like one of the frontline towns in Bosnia or Croatia in the heat of the recent wars there. It is a town of ruins, crumbling car-



Explosive event: Hindu fundamentalists attacking the 16th-century Babri Masjid mosque at Ayodhya in December 1992. Their actions destroyed the building Photograph: Popperfoto/AF

cases of long-ago invasions which the people inhabit without complaint, knowing nothing different.

But one of the ruins is special. It was demolished so thoroughly that not one stone remains on top of another. This was the mosque of Babri Masjid.

On 6 December 1992, a crowd of Hindu zealots, including the president of the BJP, LK Advani, Mr Vajpayee's right-hand man, and several of the party's MPs, gathered here

and while police looked on they destroyed the mosque.

It was an explosive event, unleashing a volcano of Hindu versus Muslim communal anger in which perhaps 2,500 people died across the country. Mr Advani and several other top leaders were arrested, and the RSS, the paramilitary force that stands behind the BJP, was banned. But for the moment at least, Mr Vajpayee was unrepentant. Weeks after the demolition he declared that the mosque was "a symbol of shame

and has been erased." For the Hindu zealots, it was their movement's finest hour. But for Mr Vajpayee and the others in the party who crave national power it was, as Mr Vajpayee later admitted, "the party's worst miscalculation".

It is hard to grasp why the destruction of a seedy old building, unused for religious purposes since 1949, should dog the Indian imagination in the way it does. The ostensible reason is that the spot on which the mosque stood was the birth-

place of Rama, "lord of the universe" in the Hindu pantheon and appropriated by nationalists as their divine mascot. Like thousands of Hindu temples across the north, it was destroyed by fanatical Muslims during the numerous invasions that wracked the country - supposedly in 1528, on the orders of Babur, founder of the Mughal empire - and replaced with a mosque.

The temple's erasure and replacement are conjectural as no archeological evidence has

been found, but then so is the birth of Rama. When the abject and humiliated Hindus began chafing at the British yoke and casting around for a symbol of national pride to unify them 150 years ago, they hit on Ayodhya and the long-vanished temple there. Demolishing the mosque and rebuilding the temple have been the most important projects nursed by nationalists since.

Ayodhya has always been a potent rallying cry for the BJP. But the destruction in 1992 was a watershed. The symbol of

national humiliation was gone - replaced by a makeshift temple in a tent, a messy-ongoing wrangle in the courts, and a dire warning of the apocalypse awaiting any government that ventures down the communalist path.

The bloodshed that followed the mosque's demolition drove home the danger of igniting such raw emotion in a union as fragile as India's. But Mr Vajpayee has been unable to find any comparably effective way to set the electorate on fire.

Norway nets Russian spies

A Norwegian official said he helped trap five Russian spies by feeding Moscow fake secrets in a career as a double agent that echoed the Cold War. "It's the roughest job you can do," Svein Lemark, 47, an official at the Ministry of Local Government, said a day after Norway said it was barring five Russian diplomats from the country for spying. "They wanted to know a great deal ... all types of secret documents on defence ... and of course as much as possible about the prime minister's office," he said.

Reuters, Oslo

Ray in coma

James Earl Ray, assassin of Martin Luther King Jr, has slipped into a coma. Jerry Ray said that his brother fell into a coma on Wednesday at Nashville Memorial Hospital, where he was admitted with complications from liver disease.

AP, Nashville

Soft landing

As a gesture to an old ally facing hard economic times, the Clinton administration has agreed to release the Thai government from a contract agreement to buy U.S.-made jet fighters it no longer can afford, administration officials said. President Bill Clinton was expected to discuss the arrangement in a White House meeting with Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai.

AP, Washington

Death fall

A British real estate manager has jumped to his death from the top floor of a high-rise building, the Bahrain Tribune reported. Nigel Hoare, a senior manager of the Bahraini property firm Cluttons, jumped from the 18th floor of the Diplomat Tower here a day after he filed a false report of his car being stolen, the newspaper said.

AP, Manama

Vanunu move

Supporters of nuclear whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu said they would push for his early release from jail after Israel allowed him out of 12 years of solitary confinement. The Justice Ministry said Vanunu, 43, was able for the first time on Thursday to mix with other prisoners at the jail in Ashkelon where he is serving an 18-year sentence for espionage. Reuters, Jerusalem

United rights

The UN announced it is launching a joint poster advertising campaign with Italian clothing firm Benetton to celebrate this year's 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. AP, Geneva

Write stuff

Terry Anderson, a former chief Middle East correspondent for The Associated Press who spent six years as a hostage in Lebanon, will join the faculty of the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University. Anderson, an associate professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism since 1996, accepted a one-year contract to teach at Ohio as a Scripps Howard visiting professional. AP, Athens

UN post

Jiri Dienstbier, former dissident and first post-communist foreign minister of Czechoslovakia, will take over as UN human rights investigator for former Yugoslavia, officials said. Dienstbier succeeds former Finnish Defense Minister Elisabeth Rehn. AP, Geneva

Lifeline for children as funds flood in

By Amanda Kelly

THE INDEPENDENT's Iraq appeal has reached a total of £60,000.

The figure has surpassed the expectations of everyone involved and will allow us to supply the Iraqi children with even more life-saving supplies than first envisaged.

Professor Sood Tabaqchali, medical director of Medical Aid for Iraqi Children (MAIC), estimates our funds will allow us to treat well over 2,000 children.

The bulk of the money will be spent on anti-cancer medicines but we will also be providing the children with urgent nutritional supplements.

Howard Bell of CARE International UK, which is already helping to feed 10,000 children in Iraqi hospitals, said: "The absence of basic medicines is having tragic humanitarian consequences. But the lack of basic nutrition is an equally desperate problem which affects thousands of people."

"There are especially acute shortages of vital supplements for infants such as lactose-free infant formula. This life-saving product treats children who have developed lactose-intol-



IRAQ APPEAL

erance as a result of chronic malnutrition, gastro-enteritis and diarrhoea."

Professor Tabaqchali, who has extensive contacts in Iraqi hospitals, is helping us put together a delivery of the medicines and supplies most urgently required.

Since MAIC was established in 1994, she has organised the sending of medicines, milk and medical equipment including incubators worth approximately £323,400 to paediatric hospitals all over Iraq.

The receipt and use of the medicines we send will be verified by staff at CARE (0171 379 5247) and MAIC (0171 724 3379) as well as other independent sources. Both charities are happy to answer questions and accept donations after our appeal ends.

Please send cheques, made out to The Independent Iraq Appeal, to PO Box No 6870, London E14 5BT.

North Korea goes on war footing

By Teresa Poole
in Peking

NORTH Korea was yesterday put on "wartime mobilisation", apparently to coincide with seasonal military exercises.

The restrictions, which cleared the streets of Pyongyang of people, have also come into force just as Korean peace negotiations are due to restart in Geneva, and as the country is approaching the mid-March period when the official state media said grain supplies would run out. North Korea last week said daily rations had been cut from 300 grams in January to 100 grams in March.

North Korea-watchers in Peking said they believed the war-footing was connected with military exercises which usually take place in the spring.

Foreign diplomats in Pyongyang were told of the

Prisoner releases bring only scorn on Seoul leader

STRICKEN with cancer and enfeebled by age and torture, Shin In-young hobbled out of a South Korean prison after 31 years of mostly solitary confinement and learned the face of those left behind. "There are many more inside," said Mr Shin, 69, "I feel sorry when I think of them."

Mr Shin was one of 74 political prisoners released yesterday in a sweeping amnesty by President Kim Dae-jung that brought the nation's new leader, himself once a prisoner of conscience, only scorn from human rights groups that once were among his chief supporters.

"We are very disappointed," the nation's largest civil rights group, Minjokpui, said, noting that the vast majority of the 5.5

million people affected by the amnesty were traffic offenders and petty criminals.

Oh Wan-ho, secretary-general of the South Korean chapter of Amnesty International, said: "The government released only part of the long-term prisoners of conscience because they feared a backlash from the country's conservative groups."

that the city was deserted yesterday.

The perpetual uncertainty about what is going on inside North Korea made it difficult for diplomats to judge whether anything more than normal civilian drills were going on. There was speculation that the clampdown might be the military flexing its

muscles in order to stave off growing civil unrest over the severe food shortage. Earlier this week, the Korean Buddhist Sharing Movement from South Korea claimed that its survey of refugees on the North Korean-Chinese border suggested that up to 3 million people had died in North Korea over the past two years because of the lack of food.

Diplomats cautioned that the survey was not scientific and in their opinion over-estimated the tragedy.

Fyongyang's posturing at the moment is also probably tied to the resumption of the four-party talks that are attempting to put in place a permanent peace agreement on the Korean peninsula. Today in Geneva, preliminary talks will convene between the two Koreas, United States and China, ahead of Monday's resumption of formal negotiations.

task in juggling the still limited available supplies to meet demand. "The question for next week is how many people will come back. If more come back and the weather stays at this heat, we are likely to need even greater savings," he said.

"The reality is that if we get more people back and we can't increase the savings then we are likely to have cuts."

Marchers call for resignations over power cuts

AUCKLAND (Reuters) - Auckland residents today marched in protest at the prolonged power cuts in the centre of New Zealand's biggest city as the municipal supplier said further cuts were possible.

About 100 protesters marched down the main thoroughfare, calling for the resignation of the Mercury Energy

board. "I want to see people with skills in strategic management, people with a clear vision for its (Mercury's) future," said march organiser Hilary Ord.

Protesters called for full compensation for lost business and wages since the unprecedented failure of all four main power cables to the central business district on 20 February. Extra generators,

two restored cables and an energy conservation campaign have restored near normal conditions downtown.

But Mercury has said it cannot guarantee continuous supply until a temporary overhead power link is installed into the city, which could take another four weeks. Mercury spokesman Matthew Bolland said the company faced a tricky

سكيا من الامم

Welcome to Moneyworld

Cash registers are ringing at Britain's theme parks, thrilling developers and children alike. Tim Hulse reports

"A SIGN above the gate said 'Welcome to Bullfrog's World!' Even I was excited, and my kids were buzzing. The great metal gates swung open and in we swarmed, carried along by the enthusiasm of the crowd. And what a sight met our eyes! The place was fantastic!"

It sounds good, doesn't it? And if Bullfrog's World really existed, then no doubt the crowds would be flocking there this weekend as the nation's theme parks begin to reopen after the winter break. But the words of the satisfied customer above come from the introduction to a computer game called Theme Park, the aim of which is to construct your own imaginary park. All you need are the skills "to make people happy while simultaneously taking them for as much money as possible... because when you play Theme Park, you're riding a financial whirlwind."

And how. Business is booming in Britain's theme parks and more and more developers all over the country are looking to play the game for real. Barely a month goes by without news of some fresh project. At the beginning of March, plans were unveiled for a £500m complex at Magor, near Newport in Monmouthshire, incorporating rides, restaurants and hotels on 750 acres of land around Pencroft Castle. In February, developers of the proposed 1,000ft Festival Gardens Tower in Liverpool announced that the first 30 of its 90 floors would form a "vertical theme park" based on a jungle theme, with a 30-floor waterfall. On London's South Bank, a £17m "wine theme park" called Vinopolis is expected to open next summer. And, of course, in Greenwich construction is under way on the best-known theme park of them all, the Millennium Dome.

As competition mounts, the established theme parks are responding to the challenge. Typical is Alton Towers, the country's most successful, with around 2.75 million visitors a year. Today it opens its latest ride to the public, a white-knuckle experience called Oblivion, which features a face-first vertical drop at 110km/h with G-forces pushing 4.5. It cost about £12m to build and a range of merchandise includes an Oblivion condom "for those wishing to experience a second ride of a lifetime".

Meanwhile, at Legoland on Thursday, members of the press and a select group of children were granted a preview of its latest attraction, Castle Land, which also goes public today. At a cost of £4m, the two-storey castle features a roller-coaster called The Drag-

on Ride. It's pretty tame stuff compared to Oblivion, but will no doubt prove to be thrilling enough for the park's target audience of under-12s. The minister for tourism, Tom Clarke, was also in attendance. He had a ride on the Dragon and could be seen to duck at the point where the track dips steeply down into a tunnel. "I thought I was going to be decapitated," he said afterwards.

Opened two years ago, Legoland pulled in 1.4 million visitors in its first year and has risen to third place in the theme park rankings behind Alton Towers and Chessington World of Adventures. It was built on the model of the Danish original for £85m and, un-

like most of its competitors, it actually has a theme. Lego bricks are an integral part of most of its attractions. And it goes without saying that Lego is the major theme of the large shop at the exit.

Since last May Mr Clarke has been taking a few days out of every month to visit Britain's leading tourist attractions (nice work if you can get it) and this was the final engagement of his tour. The minister says he's impressed by the amount of research that theme parks put into their attractions. "I think they give a lot of thought to how children react," he said. "It's all very clever and yet very simple. Kids like things that move and things that are exciting. Even

today, on a very cold day, you can look around and see that everyone's very happy."

It's children who are the driving force behind the theme park boom. According to John Wilkes, general secretary of the British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions, although parents may want to take their kids to zoos and museums, there's only one place the kids really want to go. "After the age of nine or 10, the children will take the parents where they want to go," says Mr Wilkes. "The figures show a marked movement from zoos to amusement parks at around that age."

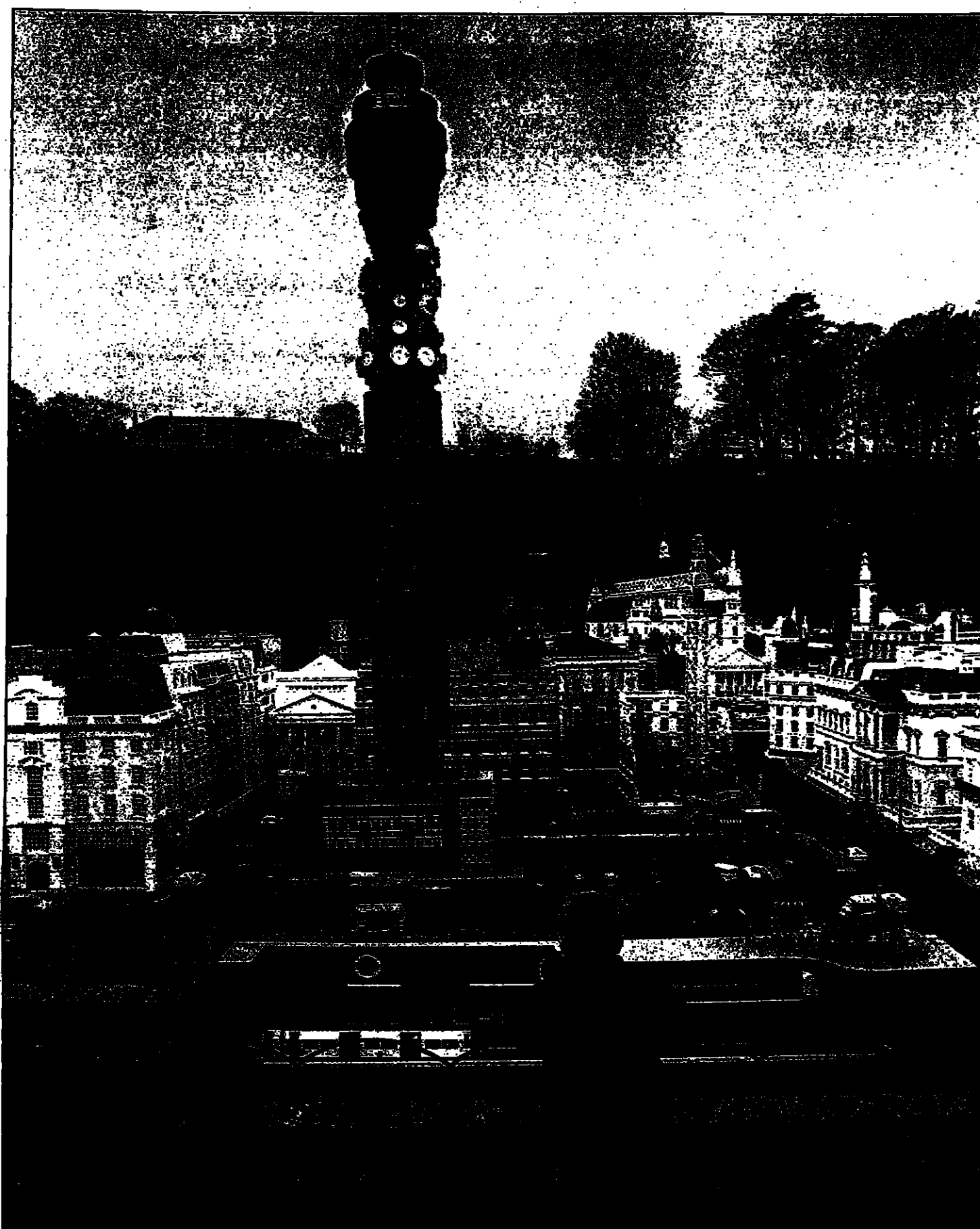
But theme parks still have their detractors. Conservation can be an issue at new sites and

local residents are often none too happy at the thought of thousands of cars descending on their country havens. This latter problem is usually countered by developers with an argument about job creation.

Theme parks really are part of the New Britain: service economy jobs, money-spinning leisure, entertainment for a TV generation, something that appeals to every class - well, the children, at least.

The appeal goes right to the top. The royal seal of approval was granted to the theme park experience as far back as 1992, when Diana and her sons were snapped splashing through Thorpe Park's Loggers Leap. But snobbery remains. In

some minds the phrase "theme park" conjures up a vision of shell-suited hordes stuffing hot dogs down their mouths. This was perhaps the nightmare vision that prompted Sir Ronald Arculus, chairman of the Kensington Court Residents' Association, to write a stiff letter to *The Times* regarding plans for a £10m Princess of Wales garden of remembrance at Kensington Palace. "Many people would like to see a small, dignified memorial suited to the historical setting, if it could be sited to enhance and not destroy the amenities of the gardens, which are enjoyed quietly every day by local residents and visitors," he wrote. "Not a theme park, please."



Towering profits: Legoland, which is targeted at younger children, pulled in 1.4 million visitors in its first year Photograph: Philip Meech

When the pain of loss grows up with you

EVERY year some 18,000 children under the age of 16 lose a parent, while many others experience the death of a sibling, friend, grandparent or family member. It may happen when you are very young, but the loss lasts a lifetime. The princes William and Harry were the most high-profile youngsters to be included in this statistic last year.

But while helpines abound for the bereaved, there has been no specialist line for children, until today. Cruse, the organisation for the bereaved, has set up such a line for anyone who suffered bereavement in childhood. They expect callers of all ages, including elderly people who have never come to terms with deaths in childhood. Unresolved grief can last much, much longer than we think.

The pattern of loss in early life can be quite distinctive. Children often continue grieving for a lost mother or brother throughout their childhood and into middle age, continually experiencing a new form of loss. The bereavement grows up alongside them, as it were.

"When I'm with my own daughter, who's a teenager and can be rather cruel, I often say she's lucky to have a mother," says Janet Dean, 53, whose mother died when she was six. "It's only as I've got older that I can see how nice it would have been to have had someone there to talk with. Everyone tells me she was a lovely lady."

Since her mother was only in her thirties when she died giving birth to Janet's sister, Janet felt very peculiar when she reached an age older than her mother. She also worries about her son because he is 18, the age her brother died. Once he's 19 she'll feel happier.

Children bereaved of parents can lose their childhood as well. "I'd just started school and I became very inward-looking," says Janet Dean. "I used to stand in the playground with my head towards the wall and I felt very isolated."

Sometimes bereaved children get bullied and teased by other children at school, who are frightened by death, and taunt them. Sometimes they believe, at some unconscious level, that the parent died and left them because they were naughty. Then they feel incredibly guilty, and behave badly precisely to bring on the punishment they feel they deserve. And sometimes they become exceptionally good and a "little mother" to the rest of the family for the rest of their lives.

"Things got even worse when my brother died when I was 12," says Janet Dean. "I'd just started secondary school and



Early grief: the princes William and Harry

I was very close to him. He was very good and nice, and he died of a brain tumour. That was much, much worse than my mother. I can remember crying an awful lot on my own in bed because I couldn't bear to worry my father or anyone else in the family. My father had never got over my mother dying and this was more than he could bear. I'd taken on the role of the mother of the family, not practically but psychologically. I would do the worrying; I would never go to sleep until all my brothers and sisters were in."

If a sibling dies, the remaining children may feel guilty they didn't die instead, or they may become jealous, believing the grieving parent felt the dead child was more special.

Dwaine Steffes, a children's counsellor and training officer for Cruse, and author of *When Someone Dies*, a book for use in schools, says: "On the whole the attention is given to the spouse, not the child," he says. "The children can feel they are on the sidelines."

"I would certainly recommend they go to the funeral, as long as it's all explained to them in advance - that certain people may cry, that the coffin may be there, that the vicar will say some nice things - and then they are left to make up their own minds whether they want to go. It can be a healing experience because without seeing the coffin they often imagine the person is still alive, in some magical way."

Janet Dean wasn't allowed to go to the funeral of either her mother or her brother, and it affected her enormously. Indeed, until her father died and she went to his funeral she dreamt about her brother's return every night for nearly 20 years.

"One problem with children is that they often find it difficult to know what death actually means, unless they live on a farm, in which case they have a better idea," says Dwaine Steffes. "They often get very confused feelings without knowing why and start becoming depressed and sad. It's very important that their form teacher knows and understands, and that the child is asked whether it wants the fact mentioned and how he or she would like the announcement made. And they must know that at any time at school they can have a private word with their teacher if they feel suddenly unhappy." Cruse Bereavement Care Youth Line: 0181-940 3131.

Virginia Ironside

Middlebrow home of the grooviest tunes around

It's all change at Radio 2. A clutch of star signings are threatening to make it hip. Vanessa Thorpe tunes in

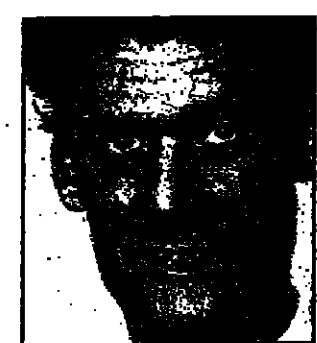
A SUITABLY velvet revolution is under way at Radio 2. It seems the BBC's most laid-back music station, originally designed for middle-of-the-road smoothies who like their broadcast chat delivered at an easy canter, has been infiltrated by a peculiarly mellow brand of fifth columnist.

Neil Tennant of The Pet Shop Boys and piano player extraordinaire Jools Holland are to become the Pete Murray, Ken Bruce and John Dunn of the late Nineties.

So is the station that brings you "Sing Something Simple" suddenly hip, or are the bad boys becoming old farts?

Another member of the groovy new team, comedian and TV film critic Stuart Maconie, feels that it is a question of Radio 2 being repositioned.

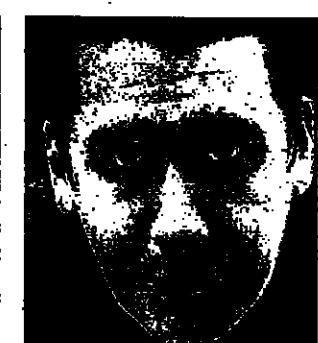
"It is because of the way that pop culture has become really fragmented. The people who really love music and spend a lot of money on CDs, the people who like listening to intelligent



On the same wavelength: Pete Murray and Jools Holland

talk, have been pushed away from Radio 1," he says.

Many of the chocolate-voiced old retainers of Radio 2, men such as Jimmy Young and Terry Wogan, do still loom large in the station's sched-



ules, but the new spring and summer line-up contains a sprinkling of subtle surprises. Johnnie Walker is still there, Alan Freeman is still there, Roy Hudd is still there, Alan Whicker is still there for God's

sake, yet further down the list is the name of the until quite recently hyper-hip Neil Tennant. In an unprecedented approach to the sophisticated end of alternative club culture, Radio 2 has asked him to introduce the Noel Coward Concert, organised by the Red Hot Aids Charitable Trust to coincide with the centenary of Coward's birth.

Jools Holland, darling of all hardcore musos, is also waiting to leap out at you waving his rhythm stick. A man who knows exactly how take his Mojo apart and put it back together in working order, he is to present a new show on Mondays.

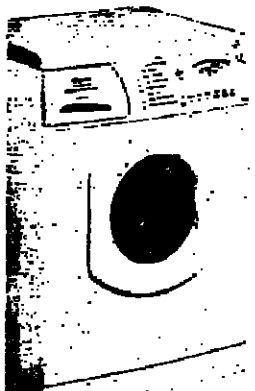
"Fifties throwback" Mark Lamarr, the slicked-back stand-up comedian who hosts the

BBC TV game show *Never Mind the Buzzcocks*, may also at last have found his middle-brow niche. No longer sneered at and subjected to ridicule by his mates because of his tastes, he is to present a new rock'n'roll series. "It is about time we had more than *Rock Around The Clock* to represent the most exciting era in pop. I am honoured to have been asked to present it."

Maconie thinks that the slower pace of change at Radio 2 is more acceptable to listeners than the way in which its "adolescent" sister, Radio 1, had its schedules altered, "avoiding the sudden revolution under Matthew Bannister that left blood all over the floors," he says.

THE INDEPENDENT

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Alberto Morrocco

ALBERTO MORROCCO was by far the finest portrait painter of his time in Scotland. Portraiture has been problematic for much of the 20th century, but he brought to it his practicality, the straightforwardness of his training, and his own vivid warmth and directness.

Portraiture is a social business. The greatest portrait painters have always been genial, open people, putting their sitters at ease, and Morrocco was born to it. One of his finest portraits is of the late Lord Cameron, done in 1974. It is a simple, forceful and direct painting, and it seems entirely appropriate that it was done in Raeburn's studio. Raeburn too was a genial, charming man.

Portraiture was only part of Morrocco's output. He painted constantly and like Bonnard, who had a significant influence on his work in the 1950s, he painted best what was closest to him: Vera in the kitchen, or in the bedroom arranging her hair, children round the table, all painted with a delicate, impressionist touch. For a while in the Sixties Picasso, Modernism, even abstraction had a place in his art. But his instinct was to celebrate. Braque became a

dominant influence and, as travel became easier and he discovered the land of his ancestors, his subject matter became more exotic and his colour more vivid.

Most typical of his later work are sunlit scenes beside the sea, or luscious still-lives bright with the jewelled red of water melons and the sharp yellow of lemons, the background bright and warm. These paintings are often touched with humour, and the composition is simplified to allow his delight in it all to shine through unencumbered, just as his delight in life itself shone through him to illuminate all those lucky enough to know him as a friend.

Alberto Morrocco was a man of great charm: warm, friendly and open, flamboyant even, but only because of an overflow of energy. With an inquiring gaze and a fine Roman nose, his intelligence and humour were immediately striking. As fitted the Scottish son of Italian immigrants, he combined the best of Scottish directness with Italian warmth, courtesy and generosity of spirit. Throughout his long career as a painter, these qualities were reflected in his art.

He was born in Aberdeen. His father, Domenicantonio Morrocco, had come to Scotland as a young man and kept an ice-cream shop. His name was actually Morrocco, but the signwriter spelled it Morrocco in letters a foot high on the café front and so it stuck. Alberto himself never thought of it till he had difficulty getting a passport because he did not spell his name as it was written on his birth certificate. His mother, Celeste Crolla, had come to Scotland as a young child and so she spoke Scots and he never really learnt to speak Italian though he made several attempts.

At the age of 14 he went from school to Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen, by his own account and with typical modesty, not because he was a child prodigy, but because in those days if you wanted to go to college when you were 14 "nobody would stop you". At Gray's he came under the influence of James Cowie and Robert Sivell, both dedicated to an almost Renaissance approach to art, based on drawing. They taught by example and his early work shows how deeply Cowie influenced him, though he also worked closely with Sivell

on a series of murals for the Aberdeen University Students' Union. He always remained a superb draughtsman. But he was adventurous too and discovered Picasso for himself; he was even sent out of the classroom for daring to try Cubism.

The Second World War saw him enlisted in the 51st Highland Division, but posted to Edinburgh Castle along with an assorted group who were all, like him, in his own phrase, of "doubtful origin". He spent the war making imitation wounds, painting numbers on helmets and entertaining the troops with on-the-spot caricatures. It nearly led to a music-hall career, but the Army would not let him go. Demobbed, he returned to Aberdeen, where he taught part-time till in 1950 he was appointed Head of Painting at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee. It was a post that he held till 1983.

If he painted throughout that time with unfailing energy, he was also a great teacher. And, if in recent years the painting department in the college has made its mark, he laid the foundation. He was unfailingly professional, saw art not as the expression of some

vague, unfocused creative urge, but as a practical business that also naturally engaged the human spirit.

He carried his staff and students along with his enthusiasm and it was typical of him, as one former colleague recalls, that he burst into the class in a sleepy studio one afternoon, declaring, "Let's celebrate. It's Michelangelo's birthday!" and carried the whole class off to do just that, ably supported by his wife Vera. In their lovely house overlooking the Tay the hospitality was always warm.

Morrocco exhibited regularly, latterly with one-man shows every two or three years, either at the Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh or at the Thackeray Gallery in London. His work is in public and private collections throughout Britain.

Duncan Macmillan

Alberto Morrocco (Alberto Morrocco), painter and teacher: born Aberdeen 14 December 1917; Head of School of Painting, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee 1950-82; ARSA 1952, RSA 1963; RSW 1965; RP 1977; OBE 1993; married 1941 Vera Mercer (two sons, one daughter); died Dundee 10 March 1998.



Morrocco: Scottish directness combined with Italian warmth

Anna Maria Ortese



Ortese: magic realist

ANNA MARIA ORTESE was the last great writer of the generation that produced Italo Calvino and Primo Levi. Today, few critics would disagree with the poet Andrea Zanzotto, who rates her as "one of the most important Italian women writers of this century". That her name rings no bells in the English-speaking world reflects more on the priorities of the book trade than on her own, admittedly hermetic, literary genius.

Even in Italy, recognition came late. Ortese's readers were a select band until 1993, when her historical fable *Il cardillo addolorato* was published (this is the only one of her works currently available in the UK; it was translated as *The Lament of the Linnet* for Harvill in 1997). The novel

topped the Italian fiction lists for several weeks and ended up selling almost 200,000 copies. Ortese was nearly 80 at the time.

This deserved though belated success was partly due to the Italian reading public's discovery that they had a magic realist in their midst to rank with the best of the Latin American myth-makers. But some of the credit must also go to the vigorous support of the Adelphi publishing house, run by Roberto Calasso, who is best known outside Italy as the author of *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (1988). Since the mid-Eighties Adelphi has been repackaging and reissuing the Ortese back catalogue—in editions newly revised by the author—as well as providing her

with an apartment in Milan for use as a writer's retreat.

Ortese was born in Rome in 1914 to a working-class family. She grew up with six brothers and sisters between Potenza in the south of Italy and Tripoli in Libya, then part of Mussolini's African possessions, where her father had moved in search of work. It was in Tripoli that she wrote her first collection of stories, *Angeli dolori* ("Angelic Pains"), influenced by the magic realism of writer Massimo Bontempelli, who also helped persuade Bompiani to publish the book in 1937.

In 1945 Ortese's family moved to Naples, a city which still bore the scars of the German occupation, with its aftermath of black marketeering and desperate poverty. Here she

fell in with a group of young writers centred on the review *Sud*, which had an influence far beyond its three-year lifespan.

Ortese's ironic portrait of this literary clique in the epilogue of her most famous collection of stories, *Il mare non bagna Napoli* ("The Sea Does Not Reach Naples", 1953) still had the power to irritate its targets—among whom were Raffaele La Capria and Francesco Rosi—when it was republished in 1994.

These stories were based partly on Ortese's articles for the weekly news magazine *Il Mondo*, in which she denounced the conditions of life in the Neapolitan *basifondati*; she wrote from experience, having lived in a shelter for the homeless for more than a year. But she nev-

er accepted the "neo-realist" label, seeing the book as "a screen on which to project one's sense of disorientation". The novel *L'iguana*, first published in 1965, is an example of how Ortese's disenchantment could also spill over into compelling, other-worldly fantasy. The iguana is one of a series of unsettling, magical animals—including the goldfinch (or linnet) of *Il cardillo addolorato* and the puma of her last novel, *Alonso e i visionari* ("Alonso and the Visionaries", 1996)—which Ortese used to deflect her frustration at the limits, and the littleness, of the knowable world.

Her measured, ironically loaded syntax has something of the hauteur of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa or Tommaso

Landolfi. Elio Vittorini, an early enthusiast, described her as "a gypsy lost in a dream". She shunned the literary salons of post-war Italy, preferring the company of her sister Maria, with whom she lived in Milan (after 1958), in Rome, and finally in Rapallo on the Ligurian coast from 1978 onwards. After Maria's death in 1995 it was her younger brother Francesco who took care of her.

Despite a steady stream of books—one every three years on average—Ortese never achieved financial independence, and in 1986 she was granted a state writer's pension. Her brief forays into journalism were limited by a refusal to modulate her writerly voice: once, while covering the Giro d'Italia bicycle race for *Panora-*

ma, she wrote that "the Giro often sails close to the sweet, unremembering shores of death".

Ortese deserves to be better known in Britain. One hopes that Adelphi's imminent revised edition of her most autobiographical work, *La Porta di Toledo* ("The Gate of Toledo", first published in 1975) will soon be followed by an English translation. Two other books are available in the US: the novel *The Iguana* (the best introduction to Ortese's work) and a selection of short stories—the first of two projected volumes—entitled *A Music Behind the Wall*.

Lee Marshall

Anna Maria Ortese, writer: born Rome 13 June 1914; died Rapallo, Italy 9 March 1998.

Bernard Mellor

BERNARD MELLOR once described the ideal Registrar at a university as "a small bald fellow who walks with a stick". He left out the twinkling eyes and the sharp but friendly tongue.

"Bunny" Mellor's tenure as Registrar at Hong Kong broke records. Well-informed, co-operative and committed, he was at the centre of the university as it was transformed from a small war-abandoned outpost into a thriving centre of learning and life. Everyone in Hong Kong could identify him. Whenever he went back there after his retirement he was in great demand. He knew that he belonged.

Mellor would never have wished to be remembered, however, only as a Registrar, least of all as an administrator or a manager. Labels do not fit him. He wrote the history of the university (*A History of the University of Hong Kong*, 1978), which bestowed a doctorate on him in 1974, the only kind of doctorate that mattered to him, a doctorate of letters.

When he had been at Oxford, his other university, he was editor of *Cherwell* and employed Edward Heath as a political correspondent. He was taught at Merton by the poet Edmund Blunden, who influenced his ways of thinking and feeling. His closest undergrad-

uate friend was the Chinese writer Yang Xian-i, who joined him as a Hong Kong Doctor of Letters in 1993.

It was Yang Xian-i who drew him towards China, a realm of the imagination for him, which always had a place in Mellor's heart. I found it a delight to travel with him there several times over the last 20 years. There was always poetry in the air.

His first prose work bore the memorable title *Ration Cooking for Small Detachments*. It was written while he was serving as a bombardier in an anti-aircraft unit defending London. In 1942 he was accepted for a commission in the Indian Army and it was from this base (through sig-

nals, cryptography and intelligence) that he was posted to Kunning, very quickly realising his undergraduate dream.

Romance and fact intertwined at every stage. For a time he worked as a member of a deception unit headed by Peter Fleming, the China travel writer and brother of Ian. One of their publications was a spurious version of the *Illustrated London News*, designed for Burma. Mellor's last piece of writing, yet unpublished, covers this adventurous period, a lifetime in itself, and his subsequent arrival in an even more adventurous China.

It was while in Kunning that Mellor met one of his

future Vice-Chancellors, Hong Kong's fifth, (Colonel) Lindsay Ride, at that time Professor of Physiology. Ride returned to a devastated Hong Kong and a looted university before Mellor: he had to report back in India before flying to Hong Kong for the first time via Rangoon in October 1945. This was an unforgettable time, like some times since, for all who lived through it in Hong Kong. Yet before settling in Hong Kong—if "settle" was ever the right word to use in relation to post-war Hong Kong—Mellor returned briefly to Oxford.

For different reasons this was to be a momentous visit. While in Switzerland he met and married a Swiss girl, Mauricette Jeanneret-Grosjean, in Bern in September 1946. They had five children.

There was one other aspect of his experience which must

be identified in order to catch his spirit. Before going up to Oxford as an undergraduate he had thought of becoming a concert pianist. It was not to be, but in retirement in Hong Kong before his last return to Oxford (via Abingdon) he served for a time as consultant and even general manager to the Hong Kong Philharmonic Society, which was seeking to create a professional orchestra.

Throughout his life Bunny Mellor sought for harmony, and all who shared in it with him will be sad to lose him, performing and conducting. Silence was never golden.

Asa Briggs

Bernard Mellor, university administrator: born Blackpool, Lancashire 8 November 1917; Registrar, University of Hong Kong 1948-74; Planning Director and Consultant, University of East Asia, Macao 1979-88; married 1946 Mauricette Jeanneret-Grosjean (five sons); died Oxford 28 January 1998.



Mellor: adventure story

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

DEATHS

BEYDOUNE: Ziad Rafiq, Emeritus Professor of Geology at the American University of Beirut, died on Friday 6 March 1998. Funeral has taken place in Beirut. Memorial gathering to be announced. Donations to the Beydoun Memorial Fund (for geological fieldwork), c/o M. Ghossein, Flat 2, 58 Bassett Road, London W10 4JL.

IN MEMORIAM

REASON: Sean James, died 15 March 1997, aged 27 years. "For we have stripped away the year / With grief and work, and found in heart, / Something with which to persevere. / Something with which to make a start." Mum and Dad.

Announcements for GAZETTE BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, etc.) should be sent to writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 020 7 291 2001 or faxed to 020 7 291 2000, and charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra).

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

TOMORROW: The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Charles, will marry the Duchess of Cornwall, Camilla, at Windsor Castle, 10.30. The Duke of York, Prince Andrew, will marry the Duchess of York, Sarah, at St Paul's Cathedral, London, 11.00. The Duke of Gloucester, Prince Edward, will marry the Duchess of Gloucester, Sophie, at St Paul's Cathedral, London, 11.00. The Duke of Kent, Prince Michael, will marry the Duchess of Kent, Anne, at St Paul's Cathedral, London, 11.00.

BIRTHDAYS

TODAY: Prince Albert of Monaco, 40; Sir Kenneth Alexander, former principal, Stirling University, 76; Miss Pam Ayres, poet, 51; Professor Sir Michael Berry, research professor, Bristol University, 57; Mr Ian Bruce MP, 51; Mr Michael Caine, actor, 65; Mr Jasper Carrott, comedian, 53; Professor Sir Colin Doolley, former Dean, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, 67; Mr Alan Eddowes, former Chief Constable, Cambridgeshire, 56; Sir Peter Graham, former GOC, Scotland, 61; Sir Philip Holland, former MP, 81; Mr Quincy Jones, bandleader, 65; Sir Gavin Laird, chairman, Greater Manchester Buses North, 65; Sir Philip Powell, architect, 77; The Right Rev Michael Scott-Joynt, Bishop of Winchester, 55; Mr Gavin Stamp, historian and writer, 50; Sir Roger Tomkys, Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, 61; Mr David Wall, former Director, Royal Academy of Dancing, 52.

Anniversaries

TODAY: Births: Mrs Isabella Mary Beeton (Mayson), author of household and cookery books, 1836; Albert Einstein, physicist, 1879; Deaths: Karl Marx, political philosopher, 1883; Thelma Houston (William Berkeley Enos), choreographer, 1976. Today is the Feast Day of St Eutychius or Eustathius of Carthage, St Leobinus or Lubin and St Matilda. **TOMORROW:** Births: Lady (Isabella Augusta) Gregory (Perse), playwright and a founder of Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 1852; Deaths: Aristotle Onassis, Greek ship-owner, 1975; Dame Rebecca West (Cecily Isobel Fairfield), author, 1983. Tomorrow is the Feast Day of St Clement Mary Hofbauer, St Longinus, St Louise de Marillac, St Lucia or Leocadia, St Matrona and St Zachary, pope.

FAITH & REASON

Who wins on the Di Wheel of Fortune?

What do we learn about ourselves from scratch cards bearing the name of Diana, Princess of Wales? asks Paul Handley, Editor of the Church Times

I want to buy a casino. I'd like to name it the Princess Diana Wheel of Fortune. You want to play roulette? Place your Di-tokens here and spin the wheel. I'm not in this for myself, you understand: 20p in every pound will go to charity. I shall apply to the Princess Diana Memorial Fund for permission to use her name. And I'll get it.

Last week I had just finished a leader for my own paper praising the fund for its efforts to keep the name of the Princess pure (though I questioned this business of trademarking the Princess's image). Walking past a newsagent the following morning, I spotted a poster in the window for the Diana lottery scratch-card. I went in and bought one. It was true:

The monies generated for the fund by this lottery will go to the charities and charitable causes which were close to the Princess's heart... Promoter: Michael Gibbins, Kensington Palace, London W8 4PU.

It lies on my desk as I write this. It might be squeamishness, but I can't bring myself to scratch it. What if I win the £25,000? We could use a new bathroom downstairs. The Di'loo, perhaps? More likely, my usual luck will prevail: Di, you've let me down.

In what conceivable way does this scratch-card preserve the Princess's good name? People buy lottery cards and tickets because they want to gamble, or, more accurately, win; if they wanted to give to charity they would give. So it's a deal that's being offered by the fund: you support Diana's favourite charities and we'll give you the chance to win £25,000. When she was alive, the Princess of Wales was not in-susceptible to the deals required by fame and fortune. She danced at charity galas in the US; she had her photograph taken with landmine victims. But such a scheme as this would not have been countenanced by even the Duchess of York. In death the Princess ought to have been allowed to rest in peace.

The moral high ground on this issue is, admittedly, not very high, and those who attempt to stand there find it pretty swampy. The lottery sufferers

who will benefit from the first pay-outs from the fund, announced last Monday, won't care particularly how the money was raised. And there is little to choose between the different forms of gambling, from village-fete raffles to City investments. Church leaders, in the main, declined to criticise the National Lottery when it was launched, and besides, the days when the Church might have kept itself untainted are long gone. Even those churches which abjure gambling for money have somehow to explain away a faith that seems to offer a similar sort of deal: "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." As a result, the gospel of prosperity has taken hold in many places around the world, most particularly in South America and parts of Africa.

The most recent example to come from *Miracle Money*, an American Pentecostal tract, "John", the author, was visited one night by a disconsolate Jesus:

"John, I usually cannot multiply back to my children the money they give me." I asked, "Why not, Lord? Your Word says you will." "My children usually make two mistakes when they give to me. First, they seldom give

the exact amount I tell them to give... Second, they usually give without expecting anything specific back in return. John, the multiplication of money back to the giver is a miracle, and my miracles operate by faith. When my people give without expecting anything back, they have not given in faith."

Like all heretical nonsense, this approaches the truth then distorts it grotesquely. Yes, there are demands for payment in most of the world faiths, in the currency of prayer, devotion, and alms-giving (and support of the priesthood); and there are offers of a reward, in terms not only of eternal life but often some sort of help and support in this world. But the idea of our doing a deal with God is illusory: in a relationship with an almighty creator, we can only receive. The divine call, though, is not to passive acceptance but to partnership. As a consequence, Christians use this season of Lent to reflect on how they can emulate God's complete and unconditional giving of himself on the cross.

But sacrifice, one suspects, is a concept "John" is unfamiliar with. This is where the Memorial Fund has got it so wrong. Princess Diana's memory should inspire us to acts of selfless generosity, not grasping transactions among the cheap sweets and the cigarettes.

Asa Briggs

Asa Briggs

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Drop the humbug about hunting

"DADDY, do most people think fox-hunting should be banned?" Yes, dear, according to a Gallup poll this month two-thirds of grown-ups in Britain think it should be. "And do most Members of Parliament think hunting should be banned?" Yes, dear, last November they voted by 411 to 151 to ban it. "Oh, good, so it is against the law now, then." Well, not exactly; you see, there are some even more important people, called the Cabinet... "And they don't think hunting should be banned?" Er, it's a bit more complicated than that: 18 of them say it should be banned and two say it shouldn't. "Oh, don't they say what they mean, then?" Not all the time.

"Daddy, is Tony Blair in the Cabinet?" Yes, he is the most important one. "And what does he think?" Well, a girl of about your age wrote a letter to ask him, and he wrote back saying, "I do think hunting is wrong and I will vote in favour of a ban in the House of Commons." "But that doesn't mean what I think it means, does it?" No, I'm afraid not, dear. Let us translate the Prime Minister's words into plain English for his 11-year-old correspondent, Roseanne Mills: "I do think hunting is wrong, but not so wrong that I want to pass a law against it, and I will vote in favour of a ban in the House of Commons, so long as it is a purely symbolic gesture." Thus amplified, Mr Blair's position suddenly becomes a perfectly reasonable one. So what is going on here? At one level, he is making a cold political analysis about the sorts of issues which can sway floating voters in all the rural and semi-rural seats which Labour won for the first time last May.

One reason for the double-talk is that he does not want to admit that he and the Cabinet care more about the strong views of Barbour-jacketed Middle England than the weak views of the majority, with the rights of foxes coming a rather distant third.

Another reason why the Prime Minister is reluctant to level with Ms Mills and the rest of us is that he does not want to undermine the charade of representative democracy which assumes that we send our MPs to Westminster to exercise their judgement on our behalf. The issue of fox-hunting has been presented as a "free vote", a matter of tender consciences and open government, but the truth is that a free vote of the legislature stands only by permission of the executive. This is a tricky one for a Labour Party which inveighed against the dictatorship of the executive over the legislature in the Thatcher era, when all manner of measures were railroaded through that would not have been supported in, say, a secret ballot.

It turns out, then, that all the fine talk about free votes is cover for hard-nosed calculation of party political advantage. But where Mr Blair has lost the plot is in thinking that the voters would object if he spelt out what is really going on. The Government's position has now become so double-dealing and demeaning that it is doing more damage than if the Prime Minister simply told the animal rights movement he disagreed with them. Having raised expectations among the pro-fox legions and thoroughly confused his own backbenchers, the Home Secretary this week declared: "I do not see a role for Government. We do not have a mandate for it." These are, to stay with the world of wild mammals for a moment, weasel words.

Jack Straw is pedantically right: the Labour Party has no formal mandate in the sense that its manifesto promised only a free vote. But that



just takes us back to the previous layer of double-talk. How much more of a mandate does the Government really need than public opinion, a vote of the Commons and the publicly-expressed personal views of its own members?

Because the Government has not been straight with people, yesterday's fizzling-out of Michael Foster's Bill is not and cannot be the end of the matter. The pro-hunters still feel threatened, and the pro-fox lobby still have their righteous tails up.

It is time for Mr Blair to make some tough choices, say what he means and mean what he says, and trade some short-term popularity for long-term credibility. He should say that he does not like fox-hunting. It is objectionable that people should take pleasure from the tearing apart of one animal by another, and some of the subsidiary practices such as the "hounding" of children are little short of barbaric.

But he - or whoever drafted that letter to Ms Mills - should avoid describing fox-hunting as "wrong": as one with a strong ethical basis to his politics, such language gets him into difficult territory. Why will he vote (albeit ineffectively) to outlaw hunting? If adultery is wrong, should it be legislated against? If abortion is wrong, should it be illegal? On the next countryside march, expect to see placards proclaiming "A huntsman's right to choose". And if hunting is "wrong", how much more or less wrong is the greater daily brutality of abattoirs and intensive farming?

The important point is that it should be possible to disapprove of things without trying to have them banned. If our first response to things we do not like is to seek to ban them, we will soon find ourselves living in an illiberal society, and we will have failed to reach a mature understanding of representative democracy.

So the House of Commons came to the right conclusion yesterday, by in effect declining to criminalise one particular method of the necessary culling of foxes. But it would have been better if the Government had been prepared to talk about the need to balance conflicting priorities and to protect minority views in a democracy.

Instead of hiding behind pious sentiments, while justifying their contrary actions to themselves as cold political necessity, it would help if politicians were prepared to give us the real reasons why Mr Foster's Bill died yesterday. They should not be afraid to make the argument in public about the need to balance conflicting imperatives and to protect minority views from the tyranny of democracy. Even an 11-year-old could understand it.



High on the hog: Two-month-old Tamworth/Berkshire cross weavers on a farm in Essex

Photograph: Brian Harris

A 9x12 print of this photograph can be ordered on 0171-293-2534

BBC and Parliament

YOU REPORTED (27 February) that, following a confrontation between the chairman of the BBC and Gerald Kaufman MP, Sir Ch. stopher Bland has written to make clear that he has no intention of complying with the wishes of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport that he delay implementation of the BBC's plans to change its coverage of Parliament until the committee has published its own report next month.

You quote Sir Christopher as saying he believes such an undertaking would seriously compromise the independence of the BBC Governors.

This claim highlights a convenient intellectual smokescreen that has arisen over the corporation's duties towards Parliament. There is universal agreement that the BBC should be "independent"; the question is - independent of what? Of day-to-day editorial interference by the Government, certainly. Independent of the sovereignty of Parliament, of the Royal Charter and Agreement (themselves expressing Parliament's will), of the national interest or of the citizen licence-payer, surely not.

A Select Committee is not the Government. It is an all-party affair, representative of all strands of the House of Commons. It is not just one of the vital organs of our society, alongside broadcasting: it is part of the sovereign organ. For a healthy and civilised democracy, those vital organs must have respect for each other's functions and not - as broadcasting seems increasing to do - continually try to trump, upstage, browbeat or outsmart one another. The increasing neglect of parliamentary proceedings by the media, when they are not actively pouring scorn on them, is neglect and scorn poured on our unique and precious form of democracy itself.

Sir Christopher's defiance of the Select Committee is a prime example of the belief of far too many media people that they somehow lead, or should develop, agendas separate

to the overall anatomy of the society of which they are part whether they like it or not. Any organisation embarking on that route is well on the way to becoming an overnight subject, which carries the seeds of its own rapid destruction, as the last overmighty subject, the trades unions, found not so very long ago.

I do urge Sir Christopher to think again and delay the BBC's plans until next month, thereby demonstrating the corporation's overriding interest in the health of the nation it serves, rather than the heady machismo of its own self-importance.

IAN CURTIS
Somerset Keynes, Gloucestershire

Border disputes

THE "new world order" seems to rest on a dogma never openly proclaimed - that borders must never be changed, even if the states defined by them have proved unviable. Thus condemnation of the Serb use of force is followed by a request in Parliament for an assurance that the Government will not support independence for Kosovo, or its union with Albania. Robin Cook offers instant assurance: "There is no map for a greater Croatia, a greater Serbia, or a greater Albania."

In other words, the Kosovo Albanians, like the Serbs and Croats of Bosnia, must for ever remain part of a state they detest. There must be an "end to violence" and a "negotiated settlement".

The policy of all borders being externally sacred is an artificial and doomed attempt to freeze the course of history. It is particularly absurd in the case of Yugoslavia, since the borders concerned were those of provinces, not independent states.

I believe this policy rests principally on the experience of the 1938 Munich agreement, where borders were redrawn in order to prevent war, and this did not prevent war. For all this government's obsession with being modern, we appear to be going into the next century with a foreign policy stance conditioned by the experience of the Second World War, as the recent spate of rhetoric over Iraq showed.

Those people denied self-determination in the post-war settlements will not go away. Neither repression nor negotiation solves ethnic problems; they are solved only by moving populations or changing borders. Since the latter is obviously the more humane, why must it never even be discussed?

JOHN EDMONDSON
Glastonbury, Somerset

Blair in church

THE CAPTION to your picture of the Prime Minister at church during the Labour Party Conference (4 March) is incorrect. The service was not a Catholic Mass, but an Anglican Eucharist celebrated in Brighton Parish Church by the Bishop of Chichester (who also appears in your picture greeting Mrs Blair). The Prime Minister is pictured in conversation with the Roman Catholic Bishop of Arundel and Brighton who had been invited to preach at the service.

The occasion aptly illustrates the Prime Minister's ecumenical outlook, as well as the convergence of the churches, rather than any "turning to Rome".

CANON PETER ATKINSON
Chichester, West Sussex

Philip's memorial

YOUR "In the News" article on Prince Philip (9 March) commented: "It is unlikely he will ever have a memorial named after him." He already has - the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

For many years I have worked in it as a group leader, and on several occasions have had the pleasure of meeting Prince Philip. In the company of young people from all backgrounds he was attentive, cheerful and remarkably well informed.

If there were a choice between the Albert Memorial and the thousands of young people who have enjoyed the programme of achievement and adventure, I know which the Duke of Edinburgh would happily choose. The Rev J CLIVE TOUGHER
Ashbourne, Derbyshire

Indeed, sir?

I TRUST that the newly affluent Independent can afford for its library a book starring the inimitable Jeeves, so that your staff may be reminded that he was not a butler, but a gentleman's personal gentleman. It is indeed time you moved upmarket, as promised, in the light of your report "School to teach Jeeves a lesson" (12 March). Jeeves butted only once in a Wodehouse moon, to help out his butler uncle Charlie Silversmith. MURRAY HEDGCOCK
The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)
London SW14

IN YOUR leading article "Buttling for Britain" (12 March) you state: "Britain butles better". Of course we are.

PAUL BUTTLE
Keswick, Cumbria

Modern Latin

HENRY WICKENS (letter, 11 March) rather overstates his case in arguing that the Greeks and other Orthodox nations would object to the idea of Latin becoming the lingua franca of the European Union.

Latin was, for several centuries after the foundation of Constantinople, the administrative language of the Roman Empire (both East and West). It is true that modern Greek owes (some of) its origins to classical Greek, in the same way that French, Catalan, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian have their roots in Latin; but, unlike classical Greek, Latin is actually still a spoken language, therefore serviceable for modern-day administrative idiom.

It is also true that the Bulgars speak a variant of the Slavonic language, but the Romanians have a language which is closer to Latin, as their very name suggests, than any west European language.

As to the argument from religion, the Germans might well protest at their language not being recognised as an internal language of the Commission on the grounds that German was the language of the Reformation. But then as we all learnt from our great uncles, God is an Englishman! JOHN CRAWFORD
Thurleston, Devon

Age no bar

YOUR NEW proprietorial arrangement seems promising. Lots of luck. I am disconcerted to learn, however, that you plan to appeal to "a young professional, high-income, educated readership" (report, 12 March). Will there be no appeal to middle-aged - even old - "high-income, educated, etc."? Not only are we, too, "truly looking for an independent viewpoint", some of us have more money than some of them. STEWART RUSSELL
London SE10

[We mean "young in spirit" - Eds]

LETTER from THE EDITOR

IT'S BEEN a great week for *The Independent* and *The Independent on Sunday*. On Wednesday, our two titles were bought by Tony O'Reilly's Independent Newspapers Group. We are now guaranteed strong financial security, and we have an exhilarating brief to take the papers to the top of the market, to make them the best most intelligent reads around. Andrew Marr, who returned this week to the papers after a short absence, and I will be working towards this end together. Our partnership has raised more than a few cynical eyebrows this week, but I'm delighted at the prospect of working with Andy. As he said yesterday, we're two very different people, with different histories and prejudices and talents. But newspapers are big places and they need as much input as possible. From this week, *The Independent* has become a much more open and lateral-thinking organisation. It's immensely exciting to be part of it.

ON THURSDAY night, we took our campaign for tax relief on arts funding to the Royal Academy, where Melvyn Bragg chaired a debate on the pros and cons of adopting the long-established American system of arts support. There it is simple. Make a donation to your local theatre, the Metropolitan museum, or a poetry society and you can claim

instant, uncomplicated tax relief. Here, we're bound up in interminable red tape and as a result our arts are suffering - in crisis, many would say.

But the arts should never be underestimated. As Jude Kelly, director of the west Yorkshire Playhouse, put it: "The Government simply doesn't understand how the arts can change lives. There was once a time when they were embarrassing to think that reading and writing - or women's rights - were essential parts of humanising and enhancing a society. No longer true. Now the arts need to be looked at in this way - they're as vital to well-being as health, education and sewerage."

THEY'RE ALSO vital to communities. I grew up in Ludlow, Shropshire, and every year they perform Shakespeare inside the castle walls. The first play I attended was *Macbeth* - marvellous at night, with the floodlit grey stone walls providing a backdrop to the stage set. Milton's *Comus* was first staged in Ludlow Castle, so the organisers were inheriting a long tradition. Over the years, the festival has become the high point of the town's year. The Shakespeare production is now just a part of a fortnight-long celebration of all forms of art - painting, jazz, dance, pottery, book readings. Almost the entire town is involved. It is good for

commerce, sociability and ultimately for community. Mark Fisher, Minister for the Arts, was present at our debate on Thursday and he warned us that we were in for "a very long campaign". I guess that spells gloomy news for us in next Tuesday's budget, but he did add that he welcomed campaigns like ours as they raised the profile of this important issue and, ultimately, would help keep the arts vital. So, to all our readers who have written in with their support, a very big thank you. We're not giving up the fight yet.

FINALLY, this week saw International Women's day. I barely noticed it this year, unlike in 1971, when 5,000 demonstrated for equal pay rights, childcare facilities, contraception and abortion. Nowadays, we don't seem to know what IWD is - or should be - about. I find this somewhat sad, but it is probably inevitable. Women have made enormous strides in the past 25 years. Maybe it is now time to let other more needy groups take over these endless "days". After all, if National Impotence day now shares its 24-hour slot with Valentine's Day, then maybe its time we admitted we've won.

ROSIE BOYCOTT

QUOTE UNQUOTE

"I think it's better if she stays in the House of Commons, don't you? At least it keeps her off the stage" - Miriam Margulies, actress, on Glenda Jackson, now a transport minister.

"I prefer mashed potato to exercise. So I have - how you say it? - muscles like mashed potatoes" - Jean-Paul Gaultier, fashion designer.

"I am not sure if I am ironically post-modern or post-modern ironically" - Terry Wogan, broadcaster.

"We are a young, vibrant, modern and forward-looking organisation made up of people with vision and energy. We are not old duffers" - Tim Larm, chief executive of the English Cricket Board.

Where I'll be in 2028, when asteroid XF11 hits our planet



DAVID
AARONOVITCH

There are so many ways to prepare to meet our doom, but one scares me more than all the others...

"WELL," I thought to myself yesterday afternoon, "I know what I was planning to do on Thursday, 26 October, 2028. Very roughly, I was thinking of spending the day at home in Il Campanile - our rose-washed farm-house near Siena - proof-reading the pages of my magnum opus, *A Time Of Giants: Murr and Boycott at Canary Wharf* and resting. In the late autumn afternoon (say, roundabout 5.30), I would have just awoken from my nap, taken my age-retardants and been preparing for a bout of enhanced lovemaking with my hormonally-replaced partner, before doing my statutory 30 lengths of the pool."

"But now," my thought continued, "I probably won't be able to do any of those things, because - at precisely that time - some bloody great lump of space rock is due to punch a hole in the atmosphere and crash into the earth, extinguishing much life and putting a substantial dent in the Murr-Boycott market."

This uncomfortable cogitation had, of course, been set off by authoritative reports from a body called the International Astronomical Union, that a large asteroid (fireball XF11) was definitely on course to pass within a few thousand miles of the earth. In space terms that is very close (actually in Earth terms it's pretty close too; Aberdeen often seems further away than that).

Now, it was something similar - except four times larger - that landed on the Yucatan peninsula sometime in the Cretaceous period, and left us with only crocodiles, rhinos and the Countryside Alliance to remind us of the time when dinosaurs ruled the earth. XF11, if it were to hit us, would kill between a quarter and a half of the world's population, we were told, and leave large parts of the earth uninhabitable.

As I digested the need to alter my Ital-

ian plans in the light of this new information, other thoughts began to crowd into my already cluttered head. The first thing I realised was that - contrary to my earlier belief - the powers that be would not be able to suppress all knowledge of impending doom while they prepared special bunkers for themselves on Mars. Some bloody attention-seeking astronomist would be sure to blab.

Then I began to wonder what the effect of this certain knowledge was going to be on my fellow citizens. In the first seconds after hearing the story of XF11 nearly everyone I knew calculated exactly how old they'd be at the moment of impact. Those who would still be under 60 felt very gloomy indeed, almost cheated in fact. It was hard to escape a sense of being envied for already having made it to forty.

Then there was the difficulty in dealing with everyday issues and transactions that were likely to be transformed. Pensions and mortgages, with their finite payment periods now likely to be curtailed, were the most obvious. But what was going to happen to house prices generally? Would it be easier or harder to sell up and move?

And anyway, didn't much of this depend on exactly where the asteroid struck us? If New Zealand or the Pacific looked like being the landing site for XF11, then we Britishers might well survive, albeit in the perpetual gloom of a dust cloud (remember, loads of Californians get by in LA). If, however, it looked like Birmingham was going to be the epicentre of an impending collision, then one would have to decide whether to stay or to go. The odious Monday Club would hopefully be faced with busloads of Anglo-Caribbeans, suddenly anxious to take them up on their kind offer of funded repatriation.

Many vexed policy discussions would simply cease. There wouldn't seem to be much point in holding another Earth summit: no-one would worry much about global warming. Tobacco advertising would become redundant because everybody would smoke. The birth rate would fall dramatically and fifteen years later - as a result - so would the incidence of crime.

On the plus side many more young women might be willing to sleep with older men who will be using the (now) more convincing "tomorrow we die" pretext. If *fin-de-siècle* prompts interestingly de-bauched behaviour, just think what delights *fin-du-monde* might not lead to!

But alas, every impacting asteroid has its downside. Many of our less intellectually robust fellow humans will join the growing ranks of vindicated Millennarians, seeking salvation through the drinking of urine; the eating of scorpions and the worshipping of little pony-tailed deities from Budleigh Salterton. They will want to convert all of us and it will make arguing with a whole sect of Trotskyists seem like a summer holiday.

This last prospect alone - I thought - should be enough to prompt an international effort aimed at diverting XF11 from its present course. Surely a probe - funded by the lottery, containing an American smart bomb, piloted by a member of the RAF, guided by Microsoft, designed by Alexander McQueen and organised by Peter Mandelson - could be launched at some point in the next thirty years, and three decades of tedious evangelism averted?

And then Nasa announced that, actually, XF11 was coming nowhere near us. We had been spared.

In Blair's Britain, everyone is included - even the outcasts



TREVOR
PHILLIPS

New Labour has found a way to cast its net over just about everyone. And why not?

IT HAD to come. This Government is so damned inclusive, that it would only be a matter of time before it was caught locked in embrace with some of Labour's traditional enemies. The first signs came with the rash of business appointments to government jobs - Lord Simons, for example. Then Sports Minister Tony Banks brought in his old Tory sparring partner David Mellor to speak up for football fans. Those who stalk the corridors of Downing Street and Millbank tell me that you can hardly go for a pee without running into Liberal Democrats taking a break from the latest joint committee on constitutional reform. Ministers even turned up on the Countryside March, which was called to lambast the Government for letting down rural voters. And the Prime Minister has generously donated some of his old speeches and ideas to the Leader of the Opposition for use in foreign parts.

Now ministers are drawing the consumers of public services into their embrace. It will not endear them to the professional middle classes, whose ardour for New Labour is cooling faster than that of a dog doused in a bucket of cold water. The sight of Health Secretary Frank Dobson's porters on Health Authorities, will put the wind up the consultants. Those in the high arts are increasingly irritated by the Government's love affair with the visual arts, the design, fashion and music industries.

But it is Education Secretary David Blunkett who is perhaps breaching the most profound taboo. He is backing efforts to ask children their opinions about their schools. This should send a shudder through the teaching profession. It is not a tightly-controlled New Labour exercise in which a few budding Tony Blairs are asked to read their best essay about "My School" to their adoring parents and indulgent teachers; this is something else altogether, and it comes from



Two truants take a break from advising the Government's social exclusion unit

Photograph: Rui Xavier

a most unexpected source of new and innovative ideas: two trades unions.

The public sector; union Unison and its partner the National Association of Social Workers in Education have published a survey showing that up to half a million pupils a day are involved in truancy, and some 80,000 hardly ever turn up to classes at all. The police say that these are the kids who then do drugs and petty crime, and cause serious headaches all round. I will leave aside the question of what their parents are doing whilst all this is going on and concentrate on what the schools might do. Almost every effort has been unsuccessful - sin bins, punishments of various kinds, exclusion. So where should we look for new answers?

The unions have done the obvious thing - which sometimes is the right thing: they are asking the culprits to advise on the problem. They have set up children's panels made up of persistent truants to talk about what would bring them back to the classroom. Inevitably, at their first meetings, the children emphasized their boredom in class. More interestingly however, they pointed to favouritism by teachers, and claimed that a later start to the school day might be more palatable. Anybody who can remember their own teenage years will give a silent nod of recognition on both fronts.

Who knows where the exercise will go? But you do not have to embrace the whole Blairite project to grasp the value of the poacher turned game-

keeper. The police now use "former" burglars to advise on their efforts in crime prevention; one such told me a couple of years ago that he was making a better living showing the police his methods than clambering through windows. Others have traded in their burglars' balaclavas for contracts with motor manufacturers and insurance companies desperate to find ways of reducing the nation's soaring autocrime figures.

The children's panels show

Germaine Greer to be appointed to the Chair of the English Cricket Board today.

In the political sphere the possibilities seem endless. Perhaps when Robin Cook is pondering his next appointment to the European Commission, Teresa Gorman, who seems unnaturally quiet at present, should be given something useful to do in Brussels. Lord Irvine is building a reputation as a man who knows a thing or two about extravagant spending on the public purse; might

the political spectrum can talk to each other without the need to draw imaginary lines between themselves. This makes politics petty and dull; it also obscures the real divisions in our society - between urban and rural, between young and old, between secular and religious. I doubt if we need any new think tanks or forums; but we certainly need those that exist to begin to engage more with their traditional enemies. A modern political society cannot afford a dialogue of the deaf. We will know something is stirring when the rightist intellectual David Willetts is asked to serve on the board of a left-leaning think tank, or Peter Lilley addresses a TUC economic conference.

One example of a poacher turned gamekeeper who has brought home the bacon is on display in the Caribbean, where on the first day to the current Test the West Indies put our team on the rack yet again. Several of the England party could have qualified to play for the West Indies by virtue of having Caribbean parents. With a humiliating first innings looming, it was Mark Ramprakash, the Middlesex captain, and a Londoner of Guyanese extraction, who came to the rescue with yet another outstanding performance. Thank God he's on our side, not theirs.

Might we not have a lot to learn from the unreconstructed wicked?

us how we might go even further. Why should those who contribute to solutions have to be reformed at all? Might we not learn more from the unreconstructed wicked? After all, even priests spend time studying the works of Lucifer.

For example, I wonder what the Equal Opportunities Commission would make of the appointment of Peter Stringfellow, who probably knows more about sexism than any other Briton alive. Might the Commission for Racial Equality benefit from the advice of National Front veterans like John Bean? Would Jo Brand - smoker and drinker - be the right sort of medicine for a Health Authority? It is certainly time that Kelvin Mackenzie, the guru of modern tabloid journalism found his way on to the Press Complaints Commission; and I would personally campaign for

the next reshuffle take him to the Social Security department with a special brief to ensure that we get value for money? And shouldn't the Chancellor be actively searching out Mr Ken Livingstone for the Treasury team, perhaps to help the Paymaster-General in his work in devising a fairer tax regime? This would be inclusiveness on flame.

Perhaps this is all a little too imaginative. If so, we could begin slowly, and simply start to think of opening some new political dialogues. There are still relatively few places where people from different parts of

Coca-Cola, Jane Austen - just what makes a classic?



BOYD
TONKIN

Does Michael Foot's just republished 'Guilty Men' have the marks to enter the canon of Great Books?

MICHAEL FOOT never made it into Number 10, but this summer the former Labour leader will gain an honour that might please him even more. He becomes a Classic. *Guilty Men*, the scorching anti-appeasement polemic that Foot co-authored in 1940 under the joint pseudonym of "Cato", will appear in the Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics list. Does he deserve to share a catalogue with the likes of Proust, Kafka and Woolf? And if not, why not?

Canon-making and canon-changing preoccupies our archive-minded pre-millennial time. Far from drowning in a sea of anything-goes relativism, as the doomsters claim, we draw up lists, compile charts and obsessively play at Ins and Outs. Last year, the customers of Waterstone's caused a seismic shock among the literati when they dared to place Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* at the top of the chain's Books of the Century poll.

At the time, the fuss merely amused me. Then the film and music magazines got in on the game. First it emerged that today's amnesiac cine-buffs imagine that the art began with *Star Wars* and probably think that Fellini is a sexual practice. Then the airhead readers of the rock press duly chose the likes of Radiohead and the Verve ahead of Hendrix, Dylan or the Stones. I began to sympathise

with Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells.

Classics lists make waves, but they also make money. This month, Oxford 'World's Classics' resurface in a stylish new format, 90 years after Oxford University Press first acquired the brand from an entrepreneur who (like all classic publishers) dreamed of the pots of gold that lurk in non-copyright material with a firm niche on the syllabus. These days, they can also hope to of-

'Every man with a bellyful of classics is an enemy to the human race'

fer works with ready-cooked appeal for TV and movie screenwriters. As the Hollywood joke put it when Gwyneth Paltrow starred in Jane Austen's *Emma*: they've made a period re-make of *Clueless*.

Meanwhile, David Campbell of Everyman's Library has just picked up more than £4m of Lottery cash to help him put a set of his titles in every state school. "Literature is news that stays news," trumpeted Ezra Pound. It also stays in profit.

So art-objects called "classics" proliferate, but does the concept's popularity just devalue its meaning? After all, the term when used by marketing

wizards (as in "Classic Coke") simply means the old stuff they want to go on selling anyway. Some recent bids to revise the canon do have an air of special pleading (and canny marketing) about them. When Virago's Carmen Calil bought the old plates of forgotten novels by women authors and clad them in deep green as Modern Classics, she did resurrect a few neglected geniuses, such as Antonia White. Others were just period-pieces brought back

into circulation by a social movement that caught the jettison of past fashions in its slipstream.

At the other extreme, T S Eliot famously denied that the jettison of past fashions in its slipstream. At the other extreme, T S Eliot famously denied that the jettison of past fashions in its slipstream. At the other extreme, T S Eliot famously denied that the jettison of past fashions in its slipstream. At the other extreme, T S Eliot famously denied that the jettison of past fashions in its slipstream.

thundered Henry Miller in *Tropic of Cancer* (that 20th-century classic). In this light, the classic means the totems of oppressors forced on unwilling subject peoples (including children everywhere) - the classroom equivalent of Gatling guns and Jim Crow laws.

Yet the reaction to "imperial" curricula has taken the form not of relativism, but pluralism. The scope of the classic merely grows to embrace everybody's sacred works. Penguin may offer their new, sanely unexpurgated edition of Aeschylus's *Fables*, but now Oxford boasts a volume of beastly tales from the Sanskrit, *The Panchatantra*. Our canons have expanded, not collapsed.

When Walter Mosley (judged by Bill Clinton as a classic among thriller writers) was in London recently, he recalled hearing the poet Allen Ginsberg advocate a catch-all canon that would welcome the *Bhagavad Gita* as well as the Oresteian trilogy. "Aw, man," thought the young Mosley, "Do I really have to read all this stuff?" I'm afraid so. The scrambled, mingled traditions that mark our culture without frontiers mean that the would-be "educated person" has heavier baggage than ever to carry. So which standards should apply in the booming Classics supermarket? Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity* shrewdly

portrays our urge to use comforting lists as sticking-plaster for fractured lives as its music-maven hero compiles his Top Five for every conceivable pop genre. In homage to Hornby, here are my Top Five criteria for would-be classic art-works: 1. Endurance over time. 2. The strength to cross barriers when made accessible to audiences beyond its cultural home. 3. The power to define a genre, either by exhibiting its qualities at their highest peak or else by fixing a new form. 4. A compelling connection to the fundamental forces in human experience. 5. An ability to yield new interpretations that make sense in spite of diverse emphases.

Armed with these yardsticks, how does *Guilty Men* measure up? It survives and inspires others as a benchmark for controversial prose in a Swiftian mode of savage irony (1 and 3). It speaks from a people besieged by aggressors about resistance to tyrants and the defence of liberty (2 and 4). Like many other political works, though, the fifth gear is lacking. It means just what it means, without a rich hinterland of ambiguity or multiplicity. Still, "Cato" has a blast deserves to pass its Classic MoT. Congratulations, Michael Foot: the doors of immortality are swinging open before you.

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GUS surprises City with £500m American bid

By Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

GREAT Universal Stores made a surprise move yesterday when it agreed to pay £500m for an American database and credit referencing company while it is still embroiled in the £1.6bn hostile bid for Argos.

GUS is buying Metromail Corporation, of Lombard, Illinois, in a deal which analysts said made the company an even more powerful player in the fast-growing US information business.

The company denied the deal might distract management from the Argos bid. Lord Wolfson, chairman of GUS, said: "We are a diversified group and the management team that has been working on this deal is not the same as the ones that have been processing Argos. There will be no distraction."

Analysts expressed surprise at the timing of the deal but said GUS could cope. "I don't imagine they would have done this if it would detract from the Argos bid," said Alexia Walker at Paribas. Mark Josephson at Panmure Gordon added a note of caution: "It probably slightly reduces their ability to increase their offer for Argos, but with its strong balance sheet it could still pull it off." GUS shares fell 11.5p to 773.5p on the news.

Lord Wolfson said there would be significant synergies in terms of product development and costs with its Direct Marketing Technology business, another US data company which GUS acquired for £300m last April. Metromail specialises in sectors such as telecommuni-

cations while D-Tech concentrates on financial services and catalogue shopping data.

D-Tech approached Metromail with a view to a merger last year. After GUS acquired D-Tech, it too started to look at the possibilities of putting together the two businesses whose head offices are just 10 miles apart.

Analysts appeared supportive of the deal. "Before GUS bid for Argos, this was the deal everyone expected them to do. GUS' balance sheet is strong and it can easily afford to do both this and Argos and still have relatively low gearing," said Ashley Thomas, at SG Securities.

GUS had net cash of £600m at its last year end and will have net debt of £1.9bn if its succeeds in its bid for Argos as well as the Metromail acquisition.

GUS is already a significant operator in the US credit and information market. In November 1996, just three months after Lord Wolfson became chairman, GUS paid £1bn for Experian, one of America's largest database companies. Since then Lord Wolfson has pulled off a string of deals in both its information and its retailing businesses.

"He seems to be transforming

the company," said Mr Thomas.

Under the terms of the deal GUS is paying \$31.50 (£19.10) per share which include taking on the company's debts. The deal has the backing of RR Donnelly, a printing company and the Metromail management which between them own 40 per cent of the shares.

GUS has paid a high price for a business which recorded a loss of \$1.4m on sales of \$328m last year. However, this was after exceptional items of \$37m. The company made pre-tax profits of \$26.5m in the previous year.

Lord Wolfson admitted that GUS had paid a full price but added: "The acquisition will unite two complementary businesses bringing economies of scale and a wider range of services which will be to the benefit of the customers of both companies."

Bart Faber, chairman and chief executive officer of Metromail, said the information and database industry was consolidating and that this deal represented a way of taking advantage of growth opportunities.

Argos shares closed 5p lower at 607p.

LORD WOLFSON'S ACQUISITION SPREE

Aug 96	Lord Wolfson appointed GUS chairman
Nov 96	Spends £1bn on Experian, US credit agency
Feb 97	Spends £900m property joint venture with British Land
Apr 97	Spends £200m on Direct Marketing Technology of US for £300m
Dec 97	Pays Burton £20m for Innovations mail order
Feb 98	Spends £200m on French information group for £70m
Feb 98	Launches £1.6bn hostile bid for Argos
Mar 98	Spends £500m on Metromail, US database company



RAGE SOFTWARE, the games group, yesterday announced that it had signed a deal to develop a 'shoot 'em up' game for the Sony Playstation, the games console beloved by teenagers. Details of the game, which will be released in 1999, are secret but Rage promised it would mix 'addictive' gameplay with stunning graphics. Shares in Rage jumped 3.5p to 14.5p or 30 per cent on news of the deal. Sony's

Playstation is one of the most successful games consoles around, with more than 30 million installed world-wide. Its games include the popular Sonic the Hedgehog (above). Paul Finnegan, Rage's managing director, said: "We are very much aware of the fantastic opportunities that this deal represents as a company." The news follows closely on a deal with Compaq to load Rage's Incoming

game on all of the computer firm's Presario 4600, and 4800 personal computers. Juan Montes, vice-president of development at Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, said the contract showed the company's commitment to attracting the best within the software development business. "We have seen the initial game design and are very excited by this product's potential," he said.

Barings creditors to get limited payouts

By Lisa Paterson

CREDITORS of Barings, which collapsed in 1995 after Nick Leeson ran up debts of more than £800m, could receive pay-outs later this month.

Ernst & Young, the bank's liquidator, yesterday outlined terms of the proposals, which should result in a pay-out of £190m to Barings' bondholders. Alan Bloom, national head of corporate recovery at Ernst & Young, called the proposals "a major step forward". He added: "Agreement with the creditors by the summer would be very pleasing."

Three classes of bondholders lent Barings a total of £275m between 1986 and 1994. Investors included major life and pension funds and Downside, Britain's oldest Roman Catholic public school.

However, under the proposals put forward yesterday, not all bondholders will be fully recompensed.

Those investors who bought Barings' floated rate notes in 1994 (the 1994 notes) stand to gain most. These bondholders lent the bank a total of £150m (£90.1m), and will be repaid their initial investment in full, with interest.

George Seligman, a partner in Slaughter & May and an adviser to Ernst & Young, said: "Holders of the 1994 notes will be delighted with this."

Holders of 1986 notes will receive \$59 per \$100 invested. Holders of 1994 perpetuals will receive £24 per £100 invested.

Jonathan Stone, who heads a pressure group representing holders of 1994 perpetuals, called the settlement "disappointing", saying he would have liked to see bondholders being fully recompensed. But Mr Stone said he expected the bondholders to accept the plan. "Something is better than nothing," he said.

Mr Seligman, of Slaughter & May, explained that the 1986 notes were issued on less favourable terms than the 1994 notes.

From a credit perspective, 1994 perpetuals rated lower than both the 1986 notes and the 1994 notes, he added.

However, Mr Seligman said the bargaining position of holders of the 1994 perpetuals had been strengthened by the threat of legal action.

These bondholders, led by Mr Stone, had issued a writ against Barings and some of its former directors.

Pundits braced for interest rate hike

By Lisa Paterson

THE CITY was yesterday steeling itself for further interest rate hikes following the publication of stronger-than-expected economic data.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) said the UK current account was in surplus by £116m in the last quarter of 1997 - economists had predicted the account would go into the red.

The better-than-expected current account figures were largely due to a £2.7bn surplus in investment income. The deficit in traded goods rose significantly - from £2.8bn to £4.2bn - suggesting UK exporters are still being squeezed by the high pound.

Economists were also surprised by an upward revision to economic growth over the last quarter of the year.

The ONS said GDP grew by 0.6 per cent between October and December last year, an upward adjustment of 0.2 percentage points. GDP growth for the year as a whole was revised downwards slightly from 3.2 per cent to 3.1 per cent.

Dharshini David, economist at HSBC Markets, said: "The big surprise in these numbers [the GDP figures] was the upward revision to quarter-on-quarter GDP, largely reflecting upward re-

visions to the consumer expenditure component."

Anticipation of a forthcoming interest rate rise sent sterling rising against the mark. The pound closed up almost a pence at DM3.035, down from the day's high of DM3.05.

Kevin Darlington, economist at ABN Amro, said: "Upwardly revised consumer spending will favour the interest rate hawk."

Minutes from the February meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee - which sets UK interest rates - revealed the committee was split four against four on whether to raise rates. Only the decision by Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, to use his casting vote for a rate freeze kept the cost of borrowing on hold at 7.25 per cent.

The City will now be anxiously waiting for January earnings data, due out next Wednesday along with February unemployment figures. Strong growth in pay could persuade the MPC to raise rates at its next meeting.

Charles Goodhart, one of the MPC hawks who voted to raise rates in February, said yesterday: "Half a per cent [year-on-year pay growth] is probably sustainable with the present inflation target but if it goes very much further, either in wages or earnings, then I think there would be severe difficulties in meeting the 2.5 per cent target."

Taxpayers paying the penalty for Inland Revenue error

By Andrew Verity

TENS OF THOUSANDS of taxpayers have been wrongly fined £100 each because of failures by the Inland Revenue in processing a rush of last-minute tax returns, it emerged yesterday.

The Adjudicator's Office, which handles complaints against the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise, said it had received calls from taxpayers, disgruntled that they had been fined despite returning forms on time.

Mike Savage, a spokesman for the Adjudicator's Office,

said: "There is evidence that the penalty notices have been sent out saying 'You have to pay a £100 penalty' when in fact that return had been submitted."

"People have been worried about the penalty notices which have been wrongly sent to tax agents. We think there are going to be some difficulties with the penalties being charged."

Those with a "reasonable excuse" - a definition which should include delays in the Revenue's computer system - should succeed in having the fine removed because forms had been date-stamped on receipt.

The finding was backed by leading networks of tax agents. Gerry Hart, head of Tax Team and a former chairman of the Chartered Institute of Taxation, said many agents had received penalty notices when clients had submitted forms on time.

The Revenue's computer system is thought to have sent out the penalties automatically simply because forms had not been logged on to the system before fines were issued. The Revenue has slapped fines on more than 670,000 taxpayers.

Returns compiled using the Revenue's software - rather

than a paper form - have lacked the barcodes which allow them to be scanned directly into the Revenue's computer system, designed by the US computer giant EDS. Instead, all forms have to be input manually.

The Revenue yesterday admitted that some taxpayers had been sent penalties despite returning forms by the deadline of 31 January. But a spokeswoman said taxpayers could have the fines revoked if they appealed to the Revenue within 30 days of receiving a penalty notice.

The country's leading tax-

ation professionals yesterday urged the Revenue to show leniency with taxpayers in the light of its own mistakes.

Frank Collingwood, president of the Association of Taxation Technicians said the Revenue's system "got very close to breakdown" last December and January over self-assessment. The Chartered Institute of Taxation said it would be keeping a close eye on the Revenue's working definition of a "reasonable excuse".

Taxpayers can contact The Adjudicator's Office on 0171 930 2292.

Hornby denies knowledge of a bid as its shares steam ahead by 30 per cent

By Nigel Cope

SHARES in Hornby, the model railway and Scalextric company, soared 28 per cent yesterday amid stock market rumours that the company may face a takeover bid. The 57p rise to 257.5p, a five-year high, forced the company to make a statement saying it was "not in discussions with any party about a takeover or sale of the company."

Hornby shares were suspended at 11.40am after the early rise in the stock but trad-

ing started again in late afternoon.

Hornby has had a chequered past but has been improving more recently. It has withdrawn from the toy and radio control market and has been concentrating more on its core trains and Scalextric businesses which it is aiming more at adult enthusiasts rather than children.

In November it posted a slight fall in profits to £973,000. It has been cutting overheads and improving its manufacturing and sourcing operations. It has enjoyed success with mod-

el railway collectors by introducing liveried ranges which include locomotives with the Virgin and GNER colours as well as the Eurostar trains and suburban commuter lines.

In the 1980s Hornby ran into the red when it acquired a speedboat manufacturer and expanded into the cut throat toy market. The shares hit a low of 96p in 1995 but have since been recovering under new chairman Peter Norrey. Sales of its core trains and Scalextric games and accessories have been selling well.

Name change scoots Freepages into court battle

By Michael Harrison

WHEN Freepages, the telephone directory service, decided to change its brand name to Scoot, it didn't think anybody would be upset. But it reckoned without a firm of south coast residential letting agents.

To Freepages, Scoot was a meaningless and inoffensive term that could be adopted in any country where people wanted to find out where the nearest plumber, bookshop or taxi service was.

But to Michael Deacon of Allan & Bath in Bournemouth, Scoot meant something else al-

together - an animal and bird repellent used to prevent cats, dogs, rabbits, hares, squirrels and even from fouling the garden.

Earlier this week an Oxfordshire County Court judge agreed with Mr Deacon and ordered Scoot to repay Allan & Bath a year's subscription fees and its out of pocket expenses, a sum totalling £2,750.

The clincher apparently came when Mr Deacon's side produced a box of the animal repellent in court whereupon it was instantly recognised by the district judge. "The lawyer for Freepages took one look at it and his jaw sort of dropped," said Mr

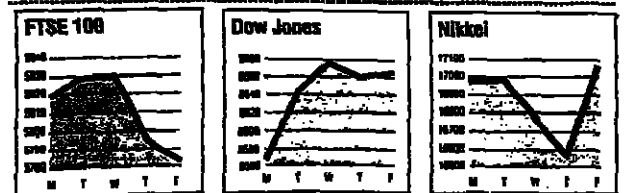
Deacon. "It was as if he was thinking to himself 'Beam me up Scottie'."

In its defence Freepages, which is now valued at £145m, maintained: "There is no difference between Freepages and Scoot apart from the name."

The judge took a different view ruling that the change of trading name "represented a fundamental breach of contract".

Freepages shrugged off its court defeat, saying it had 35,000 subscribers in the UK and had only received two complaints, including the one from Allan & Bath.

STOCK MARKETS



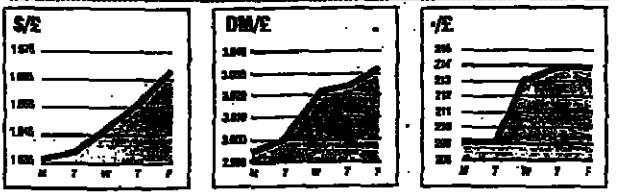
Index	Close	Change	Change (%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	5782.30	-12.50	-0.22	5951.90	4189.10	3.34
FTSE 250	5357.68	20.70	0.39	5337.00	4384.20	3.00
FTSE 350	2777.50	-2.90	-0.10	2893.20	2075.70	3.28
FTSE All Share	2708.38	-1.41	-0.05	2828.50	2182.10	3.25
FTSE SmallCap	2534.80	18.50	0.74	2528.50	2182.10	2.88
FTSE Financial	1355.70	6.00	0.44	1378.70	1225.20	3.28
FTSE AIM	1071.50	9.50	0.93	1133.90	955.90	1.01
FTSE AIM	868.04	7.25	0.84	895.19	634.78	1.81
Dow Jones	17081.14	484.82	2.93	20910.79	14488.21	0.90
Nikkei	11057.03	154.56	1.42	18820.51	7908.13	3.46
Hong Kong	4889.85	50.05	1.03	4865.72	3192.33	1.84

INTEREST RATES



Money Market Rates				Bond Yields			
Index	3 month	1 yr	5 yr	10 yr	1 yr	5 yr	10 yr
UK	7.55	1.30	7.53	0.84	5.96	-1.38	5.89
US	5.69	0.13	5.78	-0.25	5.57	-1.15	5.68
Japan	0.70	0.19	0.68	0.10	1.81	-0.80	2.41
Germany	3.51	0.25	3.72	0.33	4.88	-0.83	5.45

CURRENCIES



Pound				Dollar			
	at 5pm	Change	%	at 5pm	Change	%	
Dollar	1.6663	+1.04c	1.9772	Sterling	0.8001	-0.38c	-0.8261
DM	3.0322	+0.75c	2.7218	D-Mark	1.8155	-0.75c	-1.7657
Yen	215.96	-20.34c	-18.68	Yen	129.22	-34.03	-26.34
2 Index	108.80	+1.30	97.00	5 Index	108.50	-4.70	104.30

OTHER INDICATORS

	at 5pm	Change	%	at 5pm	Change	%	at 5pm	
Gold (US)	12.42	0.15	1.24	GDP	114.10	2.30	110.88	Feb
Oil (\$)	286.05	0.00	353.76	NPA	159.50	3.30	154.40	Feb
Silver (\$)	6.24	0.06	8.22	S&P 500	7.25	6.00		

www.bloomberg.com/uk source: **Bloomberg**

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.3687	Italy (lira)	2.980
Austria (schillings)	20.68	Japan (yen)	20.03
Belgium (francs)	60.78	Malta (lira)	0.6345
Canada (\$)	2.2678	Netherlands (guilders)	3.352
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8561	Norway (kroner)	12.32
Denmark (kroner)	11.29	Portugal (escudos)	259.62
Finland (markka)	9.0448	Spain (pesetas)	249.01
France (francs)	9.8736	South Africa (rand)	7.933
Germany (marks)	2.9548	Sweden (kroner)	12.91
Greece (drachmas)	470.86	Switzerland (francs)	2.4041
Hong Kong (\$)	1.712	Turkey (lira)	375.03
Ireland (pounds)	1.172	USA (\$)	1.6440

Source: Thomson Cook
Rates for indication purposes only

سكوت من الامل

Barings
creditors
to get
limited
payouts



JEREMY WARNER ON THE INVESTMENT INSANITY FEEDING THE RISE IN THE SHARE PRICES OF BIG COMPANIES.

Watch out for the FTSE 100 investment bubble

Anyone who still swears by Schumacher's famous incantation - Small is Beautiful - plainly hasn't been reading his business pages lately. The corporate and investment reality is that big is beautiful. The bigger the better.

Let me explain. Most of us still have some attachment to the idea of small enterprise, with its self help attributes, capacity for innovation and powers of wealth creation. But the truth of the matter is that big is where the action and money lies. Size gives competitive advantage across a wide front, reinforcing the power of the large corporation and making it more and more difficult for smaller competitors to keep pace.

Big companies tend to attract the best and smartest people, they have the lowest operating costs and lowest cost of capital. They have the best IT and management systems, and, if you believe the hype that surrounded Glaxo's attempt to merge with SmithKline Beecham, their greater market clout and R&D expenditure also gives them a better chance of product innovation.

Furthermore, they tend to command a premium in terms of stock market valuation and in recent years their share prices have generally outperformed those of smaller companies. On the face of it, there's no contest; big is simply better.

Just recently, the total stock market val-

ue of Britain's top 100 companies soared through the one trillion pound mark for the first time. To be fair, this may not be as significant a milestone as it sounds. Because big companies like to merge one with another and takeover smaller ones, the FTSE 100 share index is bound to suck value into itself. When two Footsie stocks merge, as General Accident and Commercial Union are at the moment, it creates a vacancy which when filled increases the total value of the index accordingly.

Even so, the statistic is not entirely without meaning. Today, the FTSE 100 share index accounts for more than 76 per cent of the stock market's total value. When the index was launched 14 years ago to act as a benchmark for equity futures, the equivalent proportion was only 65 per cent. Put another way, the share of stock market value enjoyed by the next largest 800 companies has fallen from 35 per cent to 24 per cent. On valuation yardsticks too, big companies have significantly outperformed their smaller brethren. The FTSE100 index has outperformed the mid cap index (consisting of the next largest 250 companies by market capitalisation) by 30 per cent over the last two years. The yield is lower on the FTSE 100 and the earnings multiple higher.

So what's my point? OK, so I could rail against the power of the corporate state, lament the way in which big business is sti-

fling competition and consumer choice, protest about how big corporations are starving smaller enterprise of capital, or generally get worked up about what a run old business all this globalisation and consolidation really is. But actually the point I want to make is a comparatively narrow one. I want to examine the proposition that the big is beautiful phenomenon is helping to create a potentially dangerous investment bubble in the FTSE 100 share index.

I know this sounds a little alarmist, a bit over the top. But just listen to this. Caps, a research organisation which closely monitors investment patterns, this week published its annual survey of pension fund performance. It showed that the collective performance of the big four fund management groups - Mercury, Schroders, PDPFM and Garton - was 0.7 per cent less than the overall median for fund managers.

For UK equities, this median was itself 1.6 per centage points below the performance of the index, which last year returned 23.6 per cent. For overseas equities, the position was a good deal worse - a performance of only 6.1 per cent against an index return of 19. These figures may look insignificant, but if repeated over time the effect of this comparative under performance on your pension would be sizeable - in some circumstances perhaps as much

as 40 per cent of retirement income after 30 years.

It is hardly surprising, then, that pension funds have begun to ask themselves why they are paying all that money for what looks to be pretty poor active fund management. Why not just stick the money in the safe haven of the index, in a basket of the world's leading companies, and watch it grow? There's growing evidence that this is precisely what they are doing. The market share of the big four for new business fell from well over a half in 1993 to 38 per cent last year. Much of this business has gone into index tracker funds.

Moreover, there is plenty of official or semi official support for it. In a recent report on the high cost of personal pensions, John Bridgeman, director general of fair trading, pointed to the underperformance of active fund management and suggested the way forward was in low cost tracker funds. If the same policy stance is taken with the Government's proposed stakeholder pension, there will be an even larger wall of money flowing into the index.

The same follow my leader exercise is repeated within the index. Because banks and pharmaceuticals have sharply outperformed other stocks over the last year, those funds which aren't in these sectors are in trouble. If you are going to lose your job for being underweight in Barclays,

you make pretty sure you are not, regardless of any rational assessment of the stock market going forward.

All this is being compounded and exaggerated by the activities of hedge fund operators and the futures market. The hedge funds play off the fear among fund managers of indexation, buying up the stocks where the institutions are underweight and then squeezing the price higher. The need to "delta hedge" futures positions creates its own form of insanity. If stock prices go higher, the futures position must be underpinned with bigger purchases of physical stock, driving the market higher still.

The big investment banks and securities houses are equally culpable. They all have their "global investment priority" bit lists, their "nifty one hundred and fifties", or whatever. Much of this activity takes place in a manner which is divorced from the fundamentals of investment judgment. Fund management is becoming dominated by the belief that big stocks only go up and woe betide you if you miss the elevator.

I'm not going to predict a stock market crash or anything as rash as that. Nonetheless, all previous investment bubbles have been dominated by large stocks too. There is an insanity in what's happening and the dangers of it are all too obvious.

Lonrho set to focus on its mining interests

By Michael Harrison

LONRHO yesterday took a major stride towards becoming a pure mining company after splashing out £344m to acquire a South African coal producer and unveiling plans to buy back 21 per cent of its shares.

The two deals mark the end of a tortuous series of three-way negotiations between Lonrho, South Africa's Anglo-American corporation and the mining company JCI and were broadly welcomed in the City. Lonrho said it expected the deals to increase earnings from next year onwards.

Once Lonrho completes the demerger of its African trading business and the sale of its Princess hotels chain, the group, founded by Tiny Rowland 40 years ago, will be pared down to a pure coal, platinum and gold mining business.

Lonrho is buying the coal producer Javistock from South Africa's JCI group for £167m and merging the business with its existing Duiker coal interests to create a combined group with 5 per cent of the internationally traded coal market.

At the same time, JCI is swapping some of its gold and platinum interests for a 21 per cent shareholding in Lonrho owned by Anglo-American and then selling the stake on to Lonrho for £177m. Anglo will be left with a 7.4 per cent stake. Lonrho is buying the shares for 106p each compared with a closing price yesterday of 99.5p.

The Anglo shareholding originally belonged to Mr Rowland, who sold it to the German financier Dieter Bock, who in turn sold it to Anglo in 1996 as part of a strategy for Lonrho to link up with the South African conglomerate.

Shareholders are expected to vote on the two deals at an

extraordinary meeting in April. This will allow time for the buy-back to be completed before Lonrho demerges its African trading interests in May, removing an overhang of stock from the market.

Once the two deals are complete, Lonrho will be a group with sales of about £1bn, assets of £540m and borrowings of £470m. The sales of the Princess hotels chain is due to be completed by about June and is expected to raise at least \$500m (£300m).

Lonrho will then consist of a coal producer with annual sales of about 22 million tonnes, a platinum business with controlling interests in four mines in South Africa and a gold mining division whose principal asset is a 33 per cent stake in Ashanti Goldfields of Ghana.

One mining analyst said: "The simple fact is that they are now managing to conclude deals which they said they would. It was imperative they did this before losing all credibility."

Nicholas Morrell, Lonrho's chief executive, said the overriding objective had been to remove the overhang of shares which had dogged the company for the last 18 months. He accepted that it had been a frustrating period for shareholders - Lonrho's share price has more than halved to just over 100p in the last two years.

But he said the challenge of turning Lonrho from a collection of unrelated businesses into a focused mining company had been "pretty formidable".

All the while, Mr Rowland, who still owns 3 million Lonrho shares, has been sniping from the sidelines.

"He is a shareholder along with everyone else," said Mr Morrell. "I hope he sees the merit of these transactions and supports the resolutions at the meeting."



Tesco: Supermarkets want to improve working relations with staff

Tesco signals end to the 'us and them' syndrome

By Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

THE GOVERNMENT yesterday hailed a new industrial relations agreement at Tesco as a prime example of how the "partnership" approach should work under New Labour.

The stores group, the biggest private sector employer of union members, unveiled a system for consulting staff and communicating with them as part of an attempt to break down the "us and them" culture.

The deal has been struck with Usdaw, the shopworkers' union with the help of Cranfield University, but it allows non-union members to participate.

Michael Wemms, Tesco's retail director, said the involvement of Usdaw was critical to the whole process. "We believe that unionised companies can do better than non-unionised providing the structure is right," he said.

Ian McCartney, Trade and Industry Minister, said he was delighted that Tesco and Usdaw were strengthening their relationship. "It is a milestone for both parties. Employers working closely with their workforce is at the heart of a successful and competitive business."

Sunday newspaper kicks off sporting week

By Peter Thal Larsen

THE FIRST edition of a newspaper devoted entirely to sports will hit the newsstands tomorrow. Called *Sport First*, the paper will be a 48-page broadsheet which is hoping to cash in on the apparently insatiable demand among newspaper readers for sports coverage.

The paper is aimed at the "serious" sports fan although it will have the liveliness of a tabloid. Keith Young, the entrepreneur who has funded the venture with more than £1.5m of his own money, said the paper was aimed at readers of the Sunday broadsheets who want more sports coverage. Priced at 50p,

it is designed to be a secondary purchase for Sunday newspaper readers.

Mr Young's is aiming for a circulation of 150,000, and the paper needs to sell 100,000 sales a week to break even. Mr Young regards this as a modest target. "You've got 17 million newspapers produced in this country every day," he says. "I'm trying to expand the market by 0.9 per cent."

The venture is a slimmed-down version of Mr Young's original idea, which was to launch a daily sports paper. However, he struggled to find funding for the idea and eventually settled for a more modest Sunday format.

The paper will have a core editorial staff of about 20, but will rely heavily on stringers and freelancers to supply match reports. It will be divided into two 24-page sections, with the second segment devoted entirely to football. It will also focus heavily on statistics, offering a comprehensive results service for even minor regional football leagues.

The success of BSKyB has shown that British consumers are willing to pay heavily for access to sport, especially football. However, no pure sports paper has ever succeeded.

The format works well in other European countries, though. Italy's *Gazzetta dello Sport* has

an average circulation of 376,000, with a peak sale of 618,000 on Monday. In France, *L'Equipe* sells 372,000 copies a day.

Mirror Group, which owns the *Sporting Life*, is believed to be preparing to expand the racing newspaper into a general sports title later this year.

Mr Young also has plans to expand *Sport First*, first producing extra issues on Saturday and Monday, before moving to a seven-day operation. However, he says the decision to expand will be driven by the market.

"We can't become a daily until the market wants one," he said.

Dunloe wins battle for control of Ewart

DUNLOE House, the Dublin-based property company, has won the bid battle for Ewart, the Belfast property group. It said yesterday its takeover offer for the company has been declared unconditional by the Takeover Panel. The offer was declared unconditional after Ewart withdrew an appeal to the panel, in which it had challenged Dunloe's earlier claim to have won control of the company. After Ewart rejected two offers, Dunloe was forced to increase its bid when Moyne Shelf Company - a firm set up by Belfast businessmen - emerged as a white knight bidder in late February.

Heineken's liquid assets

HEINEKEN, the Dutch drinks giant, yesterday said the group had 1.9bn guilders (£560m) in liquid assets in its "war chest" for acquisitions and could attract extra money. Heineken's expansion policy prioritises countries where it already has a presence, to strengthen its existing positions, the company's chairman, Karel Vuursteen, said. Heineken reported a 16 per cent rise in 1997 net profit to £761m and announced it would dilute its shares with a bonus issue and a five-for-one split.

Bank acts over deposits

THE Bank of England has obtained injunctions against three individuals suspected of illegally taking bank deposits. The three are Balakrishnan Menon, Seymour Marland-Kraft and Robin Leslie Peters, all based in the London area. The three men are understood to have been trading under the names Queensborough Investments Limited and QB Investments (UK) Limited both in the Isle of Man and on the UK mainland. The Bank of England's investigation is ongoing, and it is appealing to the public to come forward with information.

FirstGroup's bus venture

FIRSTGROUP, the transport operator, has formed an alliance with Hong Kong's New World Development Company to bid for the franchise to operate bus services in Britain's former island colony. The new venture will be called New World First Holdings and would bid to operate Hong Kong's China Motor Bus franchise after it expires in August, 1998. The venture, 26 per cent owned by FirstGroup, would compete with five others who have responded to a government tender to run 88 bus routes on the island. Stagecoach, the Perth-based transport group has also bid jointly with the China Motor Bus Co.

Media Business in bid talks

MEDIA Business Group has been approached about a possible bid for the company. "The company has been approached to engage in preliminary discussions which may or may not lead to an offer for the whole of the issued share capital of the company," Media Business said in a brief statement, adding that it would keep shareholders informed of developments. The company did not give further details. The company's shares shot up 34 per cent on the news, rising 30.5p to 132p by the close of trading.

COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Profit £	EPS	Dividend
Barclays Bank (p)	40.4m (58.7m)	3.2m (1.22m)	1.7m (1.4p)	0.9m (8.2p)
British Airways (p)	144.5m (142.2m)	37.2m (52.8m)	82.4p (20.0p)	14.5p (12.1p)
Thames Water (p)	1.85m (1.87m)	-0.107m (40.0m)	-1.44p (0.48p)	
Whitbread (p)	41.05m (47.7m)	1.59m (4.28m)	5.2p (20.91p)	1.0p (8p)

(p) - Final (a) - Interim * EPS in pre-rearranged * Dividend to be paid as a FD

WHO'S SUING WHO

JOHN WILLCOCK



A Buckinghamshire-based engineering company is suing Lloyds Bank and Ladbrokes for the return of over £5 million which it claims the company's own finance director stole from his employers over an eight year period, by forging signatures on hundreds of cheques.

The writ issued this week by Maindec Computer Engineering of Woodburn Green, Bucks, says that Alan Pateman, a senior accountant with the company, spent large amounts of the money to fund his taste for betting.

The writ claims that Mr Pateman forged 30 cheques to Ladbrokes Racing worth £129,000, and over 130 cheques totalling £280,500 to Ladbrokes Limited, in 1994-96 alone.

Mr Pateman was employed as group accountant by Maindec from about 1984 to 23 September 1996. For the last five years with the company Mr Pateman was Finance Director.

Maindec alleges that: "Since about 1988

until his resignation Mr Pateman repeatedly forged the signature of Roger Timms (a Maindec director) on a substantial number of cheques and payment instructions drawn on the said bank accounts of the Plaintiff companies, and without lawful authority abstracted funds in an amount exceeding £5 million."

The writ goes on to say: "Mr Pateman also dishonestly made out cheques from Maindec's bank accounts to persons connected with him, again by repeatedly forging Mr Timms' signature on cheques."

"From at least March 1994 he made out payments in a total amount exceeding £150,000 inter alios to his wife (Bronwyn Pateman), bookmaker (I Morris Ltd) and another bookmaker (R. Bazzil) as well as various other parties."

The saga appears to have started in January 1988 when Mr Pateman opened bank accounts with the Jersey Branch of National Westminster Bank in the name of "Michael Pateman trading as Parnell & Kass" and

"Michael Pateman trading as Keats Associates."

Maindec says that Mr Pateman had complete control of these accounts, and they were opened with the sole purpose "to steal money from Maindec and Computer Sales Agency (Waverley) Ltd and thereafter to conceal these monies."

The writ continues: "Between January 1988 and January 1997 £5.23 million was paid into the Jersey accounts by Mr Pateman. All of that money represented money stolen either from Maindec or Waverley."

Mr Pateman also withdrew money in cash and from the Maindec dollar account, the writ claims, allegedly over US\$45,000 between 1994-96.

"Mr Pateman concealed his thefts by destroying Maindec accounting records and by means of numerous false accounting entries which he caused to be made in Maindec's books," the writ says.

Maindec is claiming that Lloyds allowed these withdrawals without lawful authori-

ty, and that Lloyds and Ladbrokes "have become involved in the aforesaid wrongdoing of Mr Pateman."

Maindec is demanding the return of all funds unlawfully withdrawn by Mr Pateman.

Bernie Ecclestone's racing business Formula One Administration is being sued for around US\$200,000 in lost advertising revenue by MTV s.a.l., a French language TV station based in Beirut.

MTV s.a.l., which is owned by Murr Television, has no connection with the better known pop video TV channel, MTV.

MTV s.a.l. claims it signed a contract on 2 March 1998 to broadcast all the Formula One Grand Prix car races of 1998 in the Lebanon in the French language. The Beirut station then started signing contracts with its own sponsors and advertisers.

The day after the contract was signed, Formula One Administration cancelled the contract, saying that it had already granted exclusive broadcasting rights for the races

to another company. MTV s.a.l. has lodged a writ in the High Court in London against Mr Ecclestone's company, claiming "damages for breach of contract, negligent misrepresentation, negligent misstatement and for malicious falsehood."

It is understood that MTV s.a.l. is claiming damages equal to its forecast advertising earnings for the 1998 season, which would have been around US\$200,000.

Lastly, I must mention Mattel of the US, the maker of the Barbie and Ken dolls, which is suing the British men's magazine FHM over photos of the dolls which the mag ran recently to illustrate an article on sex.

The pictures showed the children's toys engaged in "improper, sexually explicit and offensive positions," according to Mattel.

The company filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles in order, it said, to protect Barbie from being "associated with anything obscene, vulgar or distasteful".

[illegible]

صبرنا من الازل

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The five participating banks of which credit was highlighted in field, All funds are shown there over one year old. Fund status shown on the first day of the previous month. Fund performance for the month is not after the first three weeks of the month.

It is further that it is clear to the investors have been excluded.

A list of fund offerings through a Bloomberg & PIP website.

STANDARD & POOR'S **Bloomberg**
www.bloomberg.com/us

The lesson from the underclass



Place: Oxford

On the estate nicknamed 'the city of screaming tyres' because of its teenage joyriders, the residents could teach Gordon Brown a lesson in social investment

IT'S A dangerous thing, irony. I was in the act of transferring money to my pocket to leave my wallet safely inside the house. "I think you'll be all right carrying money through the streets. Daylight mugging isn't that common here," said Jim Hewitt (of whom more shortly). I looked at him and realised he was gently pulling my leg.

I was disposed to believe the worst. As I parked my car I noted the ominous broken glass by the roadside. This may have been Oxford, the city of the dreaming spires, but I was on the peripheral housing estate of Blackbird Leys, which was dubbed the city of the screaming tyres when it briefly became the Brands Hatch of teenage car thieves at the beginning of the decade. (There are traffic calming humps everywhere now.)

In fact the glass fragments by my ancient Volvo were not the product of some delinquent radio-snatcher but the aftermath of a visit by an Oxford City Council van which had backed into the front of a car belonging to a local resident.

Blackbird Leys, despite its splendidly bucolic name, is one of the "20 most deprived parts of the country" which Gordon Brown is supposed to be targeting in the budget next week as part of New Labour's New Deal drive against poverty. It did not appear so in the early spring sunshine.

If the 30-year-old houses were not exactly neat they were far from

unkempt. The gardens were under control and the cherry trees and winter jasmine were in blossom. Most of the cars were considerably less antique than mine, and all but one had wheels and tyres.

The social indicators tell their own story. A majority of the households here rely on benefit. One in 10 of the 14,000 population are single mothers. Unemployment is almost double that of the rest of the city - the nearby Cowley car works now cover less than a quarter of the site occupied when the British motor industry was at its peak. Joblessness is particularly high among the young. And yet the local people don't seem to feel deprived.

The aforesaid Jim Hewitt, who is a community worker employed by the ecumenical church at the centre of the estate, seems quite happy to walk through the streets carrying the funds of the estate's self-help savings fund.

Mrs Jean Harwood, a sprightly 68-year-old who meets him at the community centre to put a few pence into her account (she's saving for three or four days bed and breakfast at Eastbourne or Newquay) says that if she won the lottery she wouldn't move. Even at night Sue Mollington is happy to walk home in the dark without fear when the estate's Spotlight Theatre School session is over.

Yes, Blackbird Leys has its problems. Its shopping, transport and



Stretching their wings: playworker and kids at the Dovecot After School club on the Blackbird Leys estate Photograph: Tom Pilton

health facilities are grossly inadequate. The nearest bank is an 80p return bus ride away. The new extension of 1,000 homes has no shops at all. The sight of women struggling on long walks carrying the week's shopping in bulging carrier bags is common.

But the spirit of enterprise among the people we are now told to call the underclass is uplifting. Gordon Brown's plans for more cash for such estates comes after a Whitehall analysis showing that, although huge amounts of public money are consumed there, most of it is passive spending such as benefit payments. The Chancellor now wants to tilt the balance of spending there towards creating work opportunities and improving

education and training. To find out how, he could do worse than take a tour of the self-help initiatives of Blackbird Leys.

It is not just the credit union, which now has 200 adult, and as many children, savers. (It also lends to members at just under 13 per cent, compared with the 35-50 per cent which finance companies offer on the estate, and the 200 per cent of the loan sharks).

There are, in addition, after-school playschemes, parent and toddler groups, family centres, parenting courses and much else. As well as providing services such as activities build the skills and confidence of local people so that they can go on into employment.

Amanda Jones, a mother of four

who is a key figure in the Dovecot After School club, is, at the age of 32, about to take up a job at a supermarket off the estate. "I have discovered skills here I didn't know I had - managing bank accounts, paying wages, authorising spending for equipment, organising events and coaches for trips."

It is the same at the credit union. "We thought we were too thick to be on a committee," said the assistant secretary Liz Seaney, "but now here we are using a computer."

Jim Hewitt has so far trained two treasurers who have gone on to get related jobs, one with the local health authority, the other in computer work.

At another group, Lemon Juice in one of the houses off the isolat-

ed new estate I met a group of single mothers in their late teens and early 20s who get together twice a week. Their conversation was as jumbled as the pile of toys in the middle of the room with which half a dozen toddlers played. (The estate's toy library costs 50p per toy per week.)

The talk was of straightening hair by blow-drying, of how GPs never listen to what they say, of what they will do when the government cuts benefits to force them out to work, of absent fathers, of the £120 a week fees at the private nursery nearby, of how you eke out £37.90 a week to cover gas, electric, water, insurance, TV licence, phone, clothing, food, nappies and everything else.

Without the group they would live lives of isolation. "By getting together they have taken the first step towards helping themselves," says Jim Hewitt, who sees the solution to the estate's problems in striking the right balance between proper parenting and economic productivity.

Grants from Gordon Brown on Tuesday to multiply and develop such initiatives would be welcome "but short-term initiatives which expect results by the end of the year or by the next election won't work. You can't change a mindset on welfare in five years. We need a strategic approach on many fronts - childcare, welfare, drug abuse, crime. New money needs to be long-term, and you have to consult people at the grassroots more to get the ownership of ordinary people. It's a long job."

Hewitt should know. He has been working and living there for 18 years. At one of the estate's schools, Wesley Green, the deputy head Daphne James came to a similar realisation.

"If I'm going to tell the children it is OK to come from here, then I have to live here too," she says.

Boosting the self-esteem of her pupils is the real answer she feels. Groups like the Spotlight Theatre School do it for some of them; its tap and ballet-dancing pupils successfully audition for shows at the London Palladium and a group performed with Cliff Richard and Vera Lynn in the forecourt of Buckingham Palace for the VE Day anniversary recently.

But Miss James is targeting all her kids. She has developed a programme for the school which she calls Eagle Potential. A group of lively 12-year-olds talked me through their workbooks with genuine enthusiasm for its sleepovers at school, home-made Outward Bound activities and work with old people. Most interesting perhaps, was the self and group assessments she has built in.

"We found that other people think we're capable of more than we thought ourselves," said a boy called Daniel, wide-eyed as if he was still surprised at the verdict. "It makes you feel good." Talking to them and the classmate made me feel good too.

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TOMORROW IN THE SEVEN-SECTION

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY



BRITAIN AD2000

Top architects are busy rebuilding our urban landscape in time for the millennium. So what will the nation look like? Find out in our special report

PLUS:

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Cheap laughs - pick up a hilarious free comedy tape

Decriminalise Cannabis - latest information about the big campaign protest march

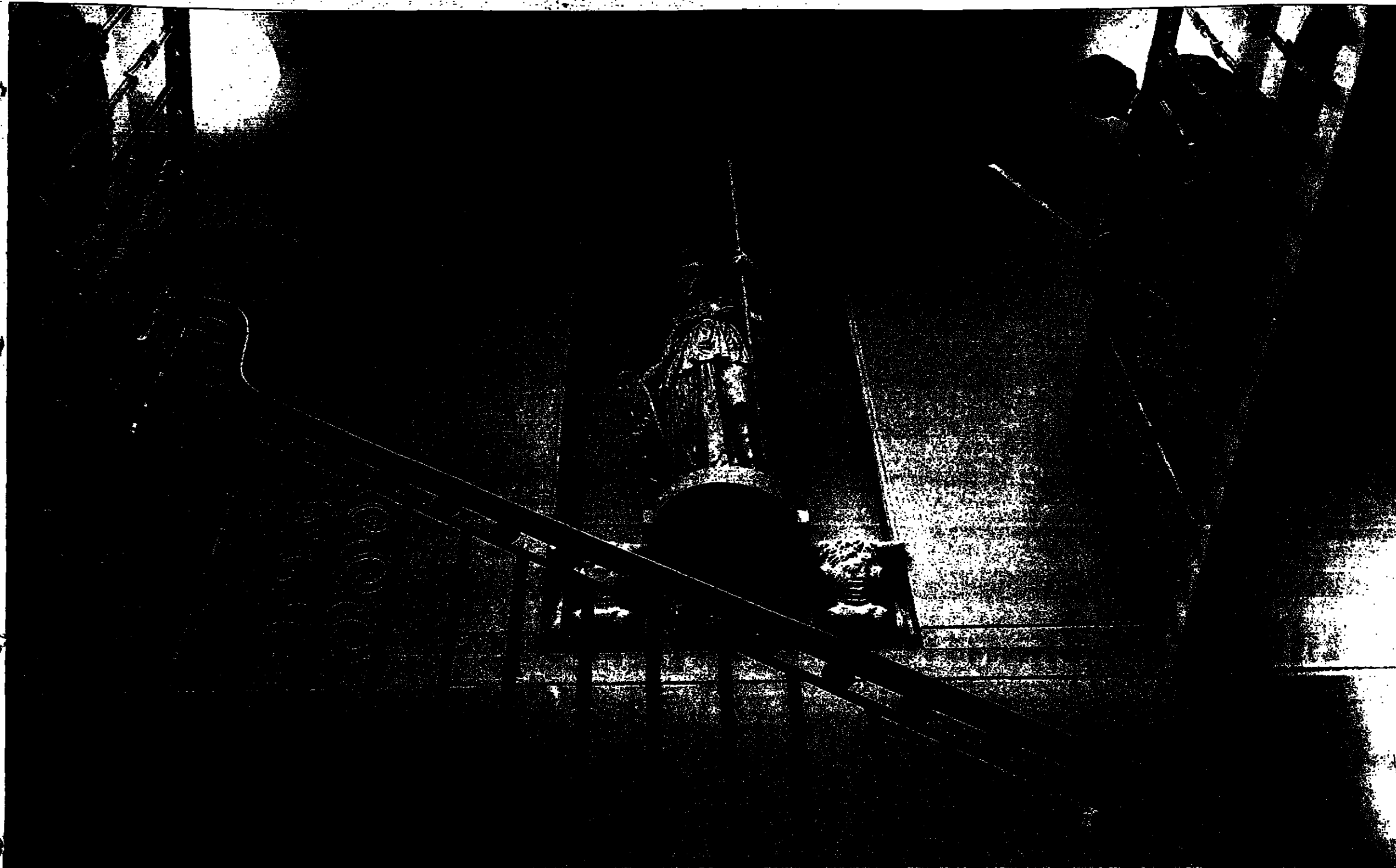
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TIME OFF

TRAVEL, LEISURE & SPORT

Saturday 14 March 1998



Reap where you have Soane

A man in a pink tailcoat opens the door to me. A quick probe in my bag, and I'm allowed into the room with all the gold. There it is, in great fat slabs like rich boys' toffee. A neat, round hole in the thick glass of a display case allows me to poke a forefinger in and touch the fat, buttery surface of £70,000. My damp fingerprint fades reluctantly.

They are rather keen on gold at the Bank of England. In their museum they have Roman ingots, twined like barley-sugar twists, and Japanese bullion crafted into yin and yang bars – perhaps in an effort to balance more than the books. But I'm not here for the money. I've come to this great windowless monument to cash to satisfy my curiosity about its architect, Sir John Soane, who, from 1788, spent 45 years of his life on the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street. For him the building became "the pride and boast of my life".

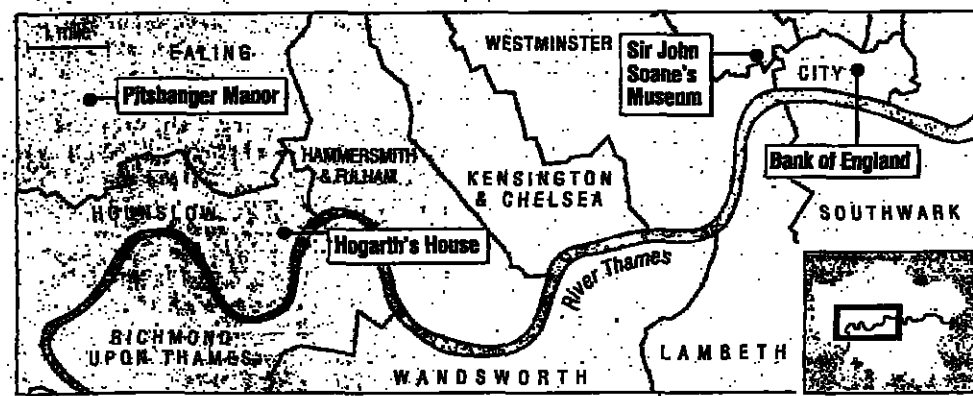
He had other prides and boasts. There is his other great creation, the Dulwich picture gallery, and his two houses, the London home in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the "country" villa, now subsumed into suburban Ealing. And there were other friends and connections, which I was to string together into a leisurely, Soane-themed amble half-way across London.

I wandered first through Soane's Bank Stock Office, a high, coolly elegant, oval-shaped hall with curving mahogany counters around the walls. It's not exactly as Soane had it built in the late 18th century. They knocked the lot down in the Twenties when the bank site was redeveloped, but had the decency to rebuild this room in exact accordance with the original plans.

There is a little more Soane to see in the other main room of the museum, the Thirties rounda with, in the centre of the room, a display case of gold ingots piled up like profiteroles, or Ferrero Rocher chocolates.

From the Bank of England and Dulwich's picture gallery to a villa tucked away in the suburbs of Ealing, John Soane left London a rich heritage.

Andy Bull sets out on the trail of the architect, collector and genius



Around the room are draped female figures, caryatids, that help to support the domed, glazed roof. These are Soane originals, rescued from the demolition. They look as though they have a weight on their minds.

My second Soane spot is just four stops away on the Central Line, at Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he bought three adjacent houses in the tall, grey-brick terrace, and spent several decades creating a unique family home in which to house his remarkable collection of artefacts. It's a house of incredible richness, from the Pompeian red of the dining-room and library, to the sunshine yellow of the first-floor draw-

ing-rooms. Soane created a magical illusion of space by placing mirrors behind exhibits, above bookcases and in recesses, and then he packed every nook and cranny with books, paintings and his vast collection of architectural fragments.

With the ingenious use of great, hinged panels, a room the size of a lift becomes a picture gallery in which the works of art are fanned as if on the pages of a giant book. And what works. Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress* is here – the tale of a young man's fall, from inheritance to madhouse, in eight canvases. In another tiny room are no fewer than three Canalettos.

This wasn't always a happy house. After his wife

died prematurely Soane described it as "the mansion of woe". He had hoped to fund a dynasty of architects, but neither of his sons – George and John – was interested. The dissolute George, indeed, ridiculed his father's architecture in two spiteful newspaper articles. Soane believed these were the "death blows" that killed his wife. The sons scowl from a portrait in the first-floor drawing-room, looking not unlike the Rake in the series of paintings downstairs.

My Soane-inspired route west took me close to Hogarth's country house, and I got off the Tube at Turnham Green to make a detour. If you have ever driven into London along the A4, and negotiated that landmark of automotive misery, the Hogarth Roundabout, you will have passed the house. When Hogarth bought it in 1749, it was to provide a place of retreat from London for his last 15 summers. Today, despite the fact that four lanes of traffic blare past its door, a high wall ensures that the garden, dominated by a 400-year-old mulberry tree, is still an oasis of calm.

Once, Soane's own country house was just a few fields away. Today it is a grind out through the suburbs. Soane bought Pitshanger Manor in 1800 and turned into his vision of a Regency villa, enhancing its yellow brick facade with four towering columns topped by caryatids, rather like the ones holding up the roof of the Bank of England. Except that, here, they had nothing but sky above them.

Pitshanger Manor has had its ups and downs. The grounds are now Walpole Park, and until the Eighties the house was the town library. But half a dozen rooms have been beautifully recreated, often with reference to watercolours showing original furnishings dating from 1802.

The other imposing thing about the place is the arched gateway. I'd seen it dozens of times, long be-

A sense of space: John Soane bought Pitshanger Manor, Ealing, in 1800 and turned it into his vision of a Regency villa. Photographs: John Voos

fore I'd heard about John Soane. And the reason for that is a little further down the green, in a Thirties building that bears the name Ealing Studios. This was home not just to the Ealing Comedies of the Thirties, Forties and Fifties, but also to much of the BBC's drama and comedy, including *Stepnot and Son* and *Monty Python*. Indeed, it still is. And, down the decades, if ever a director has wanted an imposing gateway to film a Rolls Royce purring through, they have popped next door, to this place.

The studios are only infrequently open to the public, but across the green is a pub, the Red Lion, which has always been the local for cast and crew. I finished my journey here, casting an eye over the photographs on the walls. There was Jack Hawkins, looking terribly British in naval uniform, Gina Bellman posing in Dennis Potter's *Blackeyes*, and old man Steptoe, Wilfrid Brambell, leaning away. And I noticed that he had a look in his eye rather like that of the Rake, and of Soane's dissolute son. What a trio. As George probably never said, but as Harold Steptoe might have: "Fah-vah, do try to behave properly."

Bank of England Museum, Threadneedle Street, open Mon-Fri 10am-5pm, adm free. Sir John Soane's Museum, 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, open Tue-Sat 10am-5pm; first Tuesday each month, 9pm-5pm, adm free. Hogarth's House, Great West Road, open Tues-Fri, 1pm-5pm, Sat and Sun 1-6pm, adm free. Pitshanger Manor, Mattock Lane, Ealing, open Tues-Sat 10am-5pm, adm free.

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48 hours in Los Angeles/3

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Camellia seduction/10

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RUGBY UNION

Who runs the game?/17

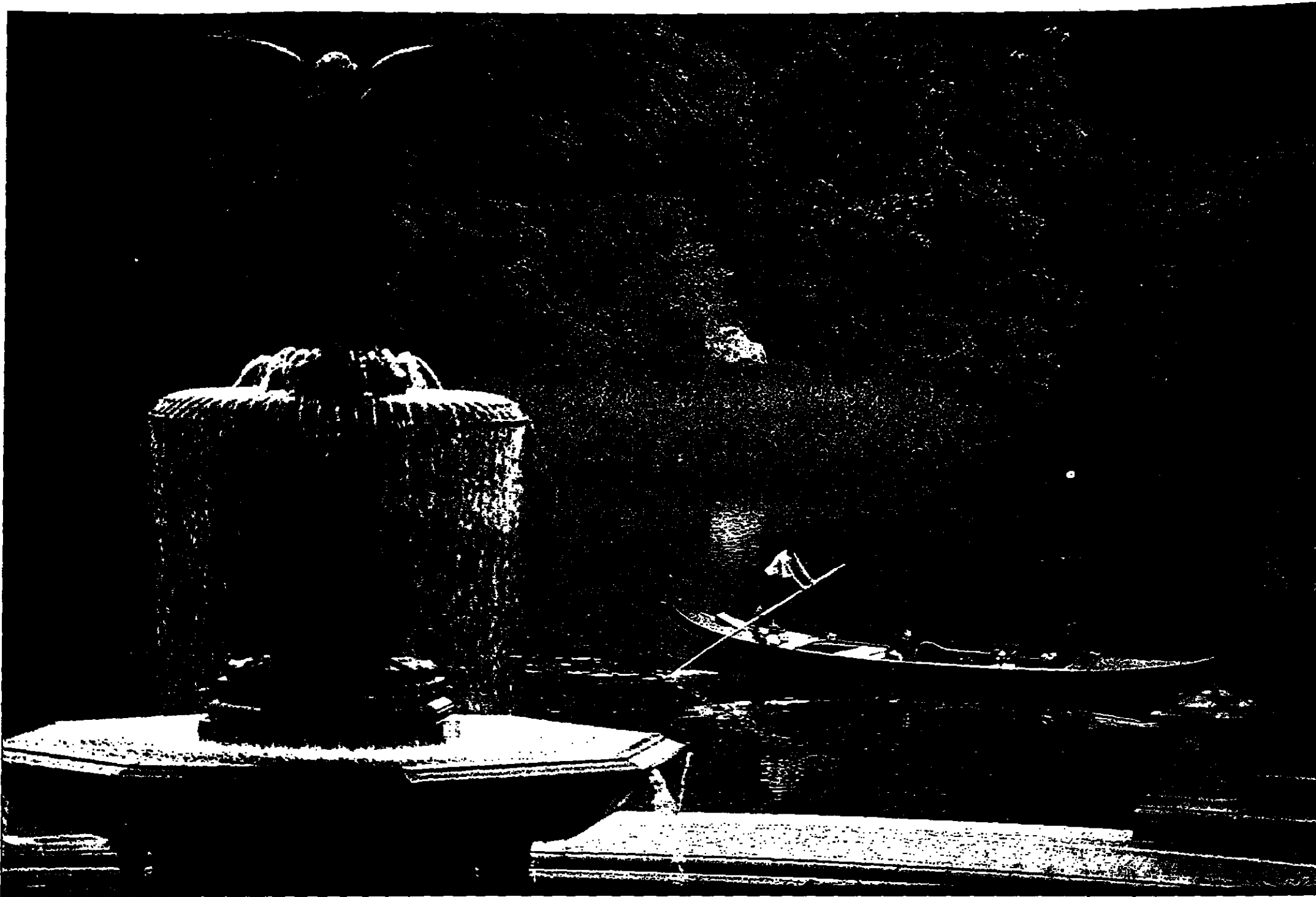
FOOTBALL

Arsenal's philosopher/22

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AIR NEW ZEALAND



SIMON CALDER

Message for Gordon Brown: your predecessor as chancellor, Ken Clarke, has stung air travellers for around £1.5bn in tax since he introduced Air Passenger Duty in 1994. You doubled the tax last November – since when the number of British travellers flying abroad has increased. (That visitors to the UK have to pay £10 or £20 to leave the country is another issue – but the consultant Deloitte and Touche says the tax deters half a million would-be tourists to Britain.)

We outbound travellers must appear so soft a touch that you are, no doubt, sorely tempted to add yet more to the cost of air travel in Tuesday's Budget. I fear that even though the speech takes place on St Patrick's Day, you may not stop short of increasing taxes to Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. But may I suggest a compromise, as just announced by your counterpart in Norway?

From April, the country will charge a £12 tax for every aircraft seat – whether or not it is filled. If a passenger cannot be found to occupy the place (and pay the tax), the airline has to cough up. Other governments charge only for seats that are filled. Norway's splendidly simple measure is designed to cut waste by persuading airlines to match the number of flights more closely to demand. At present, a scheduled airline that fills seven out of 10 of its seats is doing well; in other words, three out of every 10 flights world-wide are unnecessary.

The airlines are squealing about added costs, and no doubt fear that the concept will spread. But people who use charter flights need not fear increased fares; these are usually operated completely full, as we who have endured the 27-hour Melbourne to Manchester charter operated by Anstravel know all too well.

From France comes news of another tempting tax: on holiday brochures. Fed up with the enormous waste of these glossy publications, the French government has started to tax the holiday companies that produce them. In Britain, around 140 million brochures are produced every year – about five for every foreign holiday.

Vietnam touches travellers for 10,000 dong (about £4) for domestic flights – though judging by the list of exceptions you'd be unlucky to end up paying. Neil Taylor of Regent Holidays in Bristol found himself booking a client on a domestic flight from Da Nang, when the reservations computer came up with this list of exclusions:

"Vietnam government leaders and accompanying persons, official guests of the Vietnam Government and Communist Party of Vietnam, officials and employees of embassies, consulates and United Nations agencies in Vietnam."

Don't give up yet, the list continues: "Vietnam's hero mothers, war invalids of Vietnam's army with blindness, without arms/legs or more serious disabilities, stretcher and wheelchair passengers, infants and children under transit passengers and cabin crew on duty."

Manhattan transfers in soft focus

European cities have had the monopoly on romance, but now that air fares across the Atlantic are at their lowest ever, how about New York for the ultimate heartthrob? Adam Shaw is convinced he made the right choice

the marmalade, only to find two tickets to Botswana resting on my pillow. We might then have been on opposite sides of the world: she watching the New York Giants while I was watching the African hippos. There was also the purely practical problem of trying to arrange the trip through travel agents who were told that under no circumstances were they to return my calls, lest the girlfriend answer. So I had a series of rushed and hushed telephone conversations from upstairs, to agents who thought I had lost my voice.

On the day of the surprise itself, I compiled a cryptic crossword puzzle that she would have to solve before discovering what the present was or where it was hidden. But she's no good at solving crosswords and, truth be told, I'm not much good at designing them, so in the end I just had to tell her where we were going.

There's no shortage of hotels in Manhattan, but I wanted to avoid the chains and go for something more individual. The Plaza and Waldorf hotels are great but expensive; the Paramount and Royalton are very different from the norm, but were full, so I decided to rent an apartment from a friend. Thirty floors up, two streets away from Times Square, the apartment offered a view of the Empire State and Chrysler buildings and the Hudson river. So we spent our first night in New York nursing jet lag, curled up in front of the stunning view, eating Chinese takeaway from those white boxes you see in Hollywood movies.

Having our own apartment, we were able to pretend to be New Yorkers for a week, jogging down to the corner to buy bagels for breakfast, picking up the papers from the doorman and becoming best friends with the doorman downstairs. Despite the city's

brashness, we were amazed at how polite everyone was. Potholes may scar the streets, but you can't help looking kindly on a place whose problems are turned to advantage – eg a heating system that is so archaic that cracks let escaping steam form romantic white clouds rising above the streets.

Manhattan is roughly the size of Guernsey, yet in that small space it crams in more than 30 major museums, hundreds of restaurants, 43 theatres, scores of comedy venues and more bars and night clubs than it's possible to count. With a catchment area of millions – on Manhattan Island alone – there is a fair amount of competition for the best events. Fortunately, from London

I had already booked tickets to *Bring in Da Noise. Bring in Da Funk*. This is no ordinary top-hat-and-tails tap show: it's what they call hoofing – the bad boy generation meets Gene Kelly in an amazing dance show about the history of black rhythm music.

Our first serious mission was to book ourselves up for the remaining evenings. New York, we reasoned, is home to Broadway, and Broadway is home to the musical. The hottest ticket in town is *Chicago* – in fact, it turned out to be too hot for us to find any tickets. There were plenty of other choices – though at a price.

You can expect to pay £50-£70 for a top-price Broadway ticket and £100 if you buy

Quiet at the heart of the storm: New York's Bethesda fountain, Central Park
Photograph: Hose Azel/Aurora

it through an agent. You can get theatre listings from the *New York Times Out* magazine, published weekly in the UK. If you don't have time to pore over which particular show you see, there is a half-price ticket booth in Times Square for tickets sold on the day of the performance.

Apart from the big-name musicals there's *Off Broadway* and *Off-Off Broadway*, and on this fringe of theatreland we found a real gem of a show. Stumbling out of a cellar bar, laden with shopping, we came across *Tubes* by the Blue Man Group – musical meets performance art. At the end of the show we and the rest of the audience were wrapped together in toilet paper while still sitting in our seats – which at least ensures a close – if not altogether romantic – end to the evening.

If being bound in *Andrez* doesn't suit you, there's the more laid-back charm of the Village, where we listened to soulful jazz at Sweet Basil, wandered round small shops buying hand-made cards, and drank coffee in small corner cafes. And, for a bit of hands-on experience, we visited Our Name Is Mud – a pottery shop where in addition to selling professionally made pots they allow you to make your own clay souvenir of a New York surprise.

Adam Shaw is a presenter of BBC2's *Working Lunch*. He has just published a book with Lorraine Chase, called *Money and How to Make More of It*.

New York weekends: the fast facts

Getting there: London-New York is the busiest and most competitive international air route in the world, and since the start of this year fares have fallen to their lowest ever in real terms. At present the best deals are on Air India (daily from Heathrow to JFK), selling through discount agents for £160-£170 return. Fares on other airlines cost only a few pounds more.

New York weekends: the even faster facts

The world's only supersonic aircraft has been flying the north Atlantic for 22 years. When the first US-bound Concorde took off from Heathrow, the fare was £431 return. The standard British Airways supersonic return fare has now risen to close on £6,000. Yet breaking the speed of sound to New York can cost just a quarter of that – and include two nights in a Manhattan hotel.

The reason is that Air France has even more trouble than BA in filling seats on its daily service to JFK. The French airline is obliged to discount fares heavily by packaging them as part of weekend breaks to Manhattan. Before the end of March, Bridge Travel (01992 456176) will fly you out, club class, from your local airport (Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Manchester or Southampton) to Paris. The next segment, to New York, is in economy. But the journey home is in Concorde from JFK to Paris, with the last leg in club. For all this, you pay £1,542. The offer reappears in July and August, when the price inevitably goes up – but only by £31.

GREEN CHANNEL:

Leaving the car behind

This week the *Today* programme reported the astounding discovery that, if you restrict road space, some drivers will switch to public transport or not make their journeys at all. At least some tourist attractions in Britain are aiming to cut down on car-borne visitors.

Gibson Mill is a National Trust property in West Yorkshire which, at the turn of the century, was an "entertainments emporium" complete with dance hall and roller-skating rink. The Trust is working to

provide sustainable visitor facilities – including catering, lavatories and space for information, education and community use – without using any mains services. The Mill has never had mains services; its power is from renewable energy sources – hydro-electric, solar and biomass – and a 1927 turbine is being restored. Dry compost lavatories will be installed, local spring water supplies will be tapped. When refurbishments are complete, most visitors will be obliged to walk from the entrance to the property, a distance of more

than a mile. (An exception will be made for the less able.)

Farther south east, the Earth Centre near Doncaster is promising reduced-rate admission to anyone who can demonstrate that they have arrived at the former colliery by public transport, or under their own steam.

The drawback is that you will have to wait a year for these commendable Yorkshire ventures to open.

Simon Calder

EUROBEAT: BUDAPEST

The origins of the Budapest spring festival, which continues until 29 March, pre-date the collapse of Communism, but for travellers the joy of capitalism is simple: if you decide today to attend, you can hop on the next plane out (if you can find a seat) without needing a visa.

For 40 years, though, state sponsorship of the arts has done the city proud. The wedding-cake State Opera House offers a sumptuous centre-piece for the festival, whose highlights are like-

ly to be the evenings devoted to the local heroes Zoltan Kodaly and Bela Bartok.

Amid all the official events, it is worth searching out some *de facto* fringe festivities. Dotted around the Hungarian capital are all manner of small clubs and community centres, with busy programmes of everything from jazz to Roman music. The local listings magazines, *Budapest Week* and *Budapest Sun*, contain details.

The independent way to get there is to get a discounted flight

from Heathrow to Budapest (around £200 if you stay over a Saturday night). Private rooms and hotels are readily available and cheap. The Foreign Office warned this week, however, of "late-evening overcharging, accompanied by threats of violence, by certain clubs and bars in Budapest".

For more information, contact the Hungarian National Tourist Office, 46 Eaton Place, London SW1X 8AL (0171-823 1032). SC

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صوتنا من الداخل

48 hours in LA



See it, hear it, taste it – but don't believe it. Pascal Wyse offers a guide to America's most neurotic city

Why go now?

The stars are coming out at night in the run-up to the Oscars, the weather has a certain sanity to it, and prices – both in terms of getting there and being there – are very much "off peak".

Beam down

London-Los Angeles is the second-busiest route across the Atlantic, after London-New York. Five airlines fly non-stop: Air New Zealand, American, British Airways, United and Virgin Atlantic; another airline, Continental, has an allocation of seats on Virgin's flights.

Seats are being sold at absurdly low fares. Expect to pay £250-£280 through discount agents for travel between April and June. If you are prepared to change planes en route, you could get there and back for even less. Business class seats are available for £3,000 or less.

Check in

From LAX airport, at the centre of LA's west coast, Venice Beach makes a good first stop – given the vast distances devoured by the city. Many of the hotels near the beach have special deals with mini-van services from the airport, which keeps the cost of the trip down to around \$5 per person. The Cadillac Hotel (310-399 8876) has everything from four-person dorms to a private suite – from \$30 double. Spilling straight out on to the beach, this classic 1930s Art Deco building is a good taste of things to come.

If you're looking to stay up in Hollywood, head for the boulevard of the same name. The Magic Hotel, just off the boulevard at Manns Chinese Theater, 7025 Franklin Avenue (213-851 0800) has enormous rooms with kitchens from \$50 for a double.

Get your bearings

Greater Los Angeles covers some 8,000 square miles, so you must divide to conquer. Infamously described as "72 suburbs in search of a city", it has been stretched over its desert foundations by a network of freeways – and stretched with it is the car-

obsessed Angelinos' perception of distances. Strictly speaking, the "city" of Los Angeles is small; but it is the surrounding districts – Santa Monica, Hollywood, Venice Beach, Malibu, Beverly Hills – that carry much of the city's fame.

Take a hike (or a bike)

Like much of LA, Venice Beach has a strange cinematic familiarity – a living set teeming with everything from the odd Hollywood legend on a pushbike to a colourful cast of extras walking their parrots, selling drunken stories by the dollar or performing hard-sell pizza soliloquies. Amongst the Bohemian stalls and street art, watch out for the building-sized dumbbell that signifies Muscle Beach, where weighty issues are grunted out by the *Baywatch* crowd. Depending on which mode of transport you have settled for, you can work your way right up the coast through Santa Monica and up to the millionaire pads on Malibu Beach. If you flag along the way, pick up a bike (for around \$10 a day) from one of the rental shops along the way.

It's a straight journey along the coast, but make sure you detour behind the beachfront to take in Venice, where a few silted canals remain of the Italiane pastiche dreamed up by Abbot Kline in 1905.

Lunch on the move

At the end of the walk, capture a full LA view from the big wheel at Santa Monica Pier before heading inland up Santa Monica Boulevard to 3rd Street Promenade, where you can sample everything that's de rigueur in California's fad factory – from family meals for one to fat-free mountains. Go to Wolfgang Puck Express (don't speak with your mouth full), at No 1315 for famous cheap American grub, especially the Caesar salad.

Saturday matinee

"Hollywood" has long disguised its seediness with the glamour of the film industry, and those who are really "on the money"

live in the nearby hills with the famous big white letters. Catch a bus up Santa Monica Boulevard for Hollywood (40 minutes) to absorb the downbeat vibrancy. Manns Chinese Theater is a perfect place to get into the movie business. This enormous cinema, a combination of fake Buddhist temple and Art Deco, opened in 1927 as a glamorous location for opening nights. Outside, the hands and feet (not to mention cigars) of Hollywood greats are imprinted in the surrounding concrete. If you want to get into the underwear of the stars, peel off further west to the Lingerie Museum in Fredericks of Hollywood (6608 Hollywood Boulevard) – a proud purple-and-pink monument to kitsch.

Window shopping

The famous Universal Studios tour is a day in itself, but Universal City Walk (1000 Universal Centre Drive) provides a shorter blast of the same plastic-fantastic feel. Consume the preposterous shop façades – a 27-ft gorilla, a Chevy crashed in mid air, the neon guitar of a missing giant – rather than the trendy clutter inside.

The sunset burger

... can be found at Mels 24-hour diner at 8885 Sunset Boulevard

– a quintessential eatery, as seen in George Lucas's *American Graffiti*. Slide into a booth, drop a dime into the table-top juke-box, and order perfection in a burger.

Night-life

Behind the deceptively quiet exterior of West Hollywood lie some of LA's most lively and infamous clubs. The Viper Rooms (hang-out for Johnny Depp and the late River Phoenix), 8852 Sunset Boulevard, Whisky a Go Go (which opened doors for the Doors) and Trader Vics (9876 Wilshire Boulevard) have been mixing a range of 200 cocktails since 1955. For a more compact mile of entertainment, and some of LA's famous comedy circuit, try Sunset Strip (Sunset Boulevard, either side of La Cienega Boulevard) and eyeball the best of a very American art form, the billboard.

Sunday morning: pay your respects

"They've great respect for the dead in Hollywood," Errol Flynn once said, "but none for the living." Even in death, in LA you just have to be seen in the right place with the right people. Tour the tombstone credits of Chico Marx, Clark Gable and Flynn himself, among the manicured groves of Forest

Lawn Cemetery at 1712 South Glendale Avenue, as satirised in Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One*. A brief sojourn will give you a flavour of the ostentatious clamouring for remembrance. Having gazed at the turf for a while, take in a more cosmic view from nearby Griffith park, home to the Griffiths observatory (where James Dean was a rebel without a cause).

Bracing brunch

Canter's Deli, 419 N Fairfax Avenue (213-651 2030) is a 24-hour kosher deli and diner, with beautiful sandwiches the size of burst mattresses.

Cultural afternoon downtown

But what do LA's artists make of the place? Duck underground into the Museum of Contemporary Art, California Plaza, 250 S Grand Avenue, and its partner, the Gelfin Contemporary, a few blocks away at 152 N Central Avenue (known as the Temporary Contemporary, because of its flexible and slightly makeshift warehouse building). Challenging the monotony of the surrounding financial district, the building – by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki – displays art from the Forties to the present day, in-

cluding permanent works by Jackson Pollock, Piet Mondrian and Alberto Giacometti. The Temporary is currently housing *Elusive Paradise*, a fascinating and comprehensive survey of post-war art in Los Angeles.

Swing out of town

In *Mildred Pierce*, when Joan Crawford said "People have to drink somewhere; why not here?" she was standing at the huge, oval bar of the Derby, the engine room of LA's swing-dancing scene. On Sunday night at 4500 Los Feliz Boulevard you can take on Jumpin' James's swing-dance lesson (8pm-9pm) and show off your moves to bands such as Lee and the Press-on Nails and Ingrid and the Flying Neutrons. Once incompetently flat on your back, admire the wooden dome ceiling, which used to have water running down it as an early form of air-conditioning.

Someone to watch over me: Angelinos – and their city – have a hard time keeping things in proportion

Photographs
Sylvain
Grandadam

CHECK OUT

A plane

No coupon-clipping, promises Virgin Atlantic (01293 747230), for its latest deal. The airline is undercutting the fares offered by British Airways in a promotion with two newspapers. For £183.40 return, Virgin will fly you from Gatwick to Boston or Heathrow to Washington D.C. You must book by next Tuesday, 17 March, and complete travel by the end of May.

A boat

The first voyage of P&O Stena Line between Dover and Calais set sail on Tuesday. The two largest ferry operators on the Channel have teamed up because of competition from the Tunnel, with Le Shuttle now taking more than half the traffic.

The new company plans to have a ferry available for immediate boarding at all times between 8am and midnight. David Mott, passenger shipping correspondent for *Lloyd's List*, predicts that fares could rise by 10 per cent in the coming year as a result of the merger.

A train

Upgrade to first class on Saturday or Sunday with Midland Mainline on the line linking Leeds, Sheffield, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester and London. Using the "4-aught" return fare (£34 for four), and each paying an extra £6 each way, a group of four could travel first class from Sheffield to London and back for £20.50 each. Call 0345 125678.

A room

One Devonshire Gardens is both the address and the name of Glasgow's most exclusive hotel. Recent guests include David Bowie and Sting. The weekend special rate is £125 per night (double), not including breakfast. Reservations: 0141-339 2001.

A meal

The best place to start the day at Heathrow Airport is the bus-station café, with a complete breakfast for £3.99.

A drink

A three-hour driving ban and a fine of BF5,000 (£100) is the penalty facing drivers in Belgium whose alcohol/blood level is in the 0.05-0.08 per cent range. The Belgian Tourist Office warns "two glasses of Belgian lager will get you to that limit". Above 0.08 per cent the penalties are disqualification and a heavy fine (up to £8,000).

A week from now ...

... the Francophone world comes to Britain with the Smart '98 travel, tourism and culture exhibition. Besides organisations from the Seychelles National Tourism Office to Royal Air Maroc, the exhibition features music, theatre and dancing. It takes place next Saturday, 21 March, at the TUC Congress Centre in Great Russell Street, London WC1 (10.30am-6pm). Tickets, price £5, are available on the door or in advance from 0171-978 6846.

A month from now ...

... you should make tracks for Holland, for National Museum Weekend (18-19 April) when about 450 of the country's museums are open free or at a reduced rate. Netherlands Board of Tourism: 0891 717777 (a premium-rate number). A deal from Eurostar (0345 303030) will take you from London Waterloo or Ashford, via Brussels, to any station in Holland for £84 return.

A year from now ...

... Airtours (08701 577775) will take you from Manchester to the Maldives for £648, with half board at the Meeru Island Resort. Discos, you may be glad to learn, are described as "occasional".

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ITINERARY IN BRIEF

Day 1 Depart Waterloo by Eurostar to Paris. Spend two nights at the 5-star Nikko Hotel. Day 3 Depart by TGV to Bern and onwards to Lake Lucerne for two nights at the Drei Konige or similar. Day 5 Depart by the Nostalgic Orient Express to Lake Maggiore and onwards to the Cote d'Azur to join the MS Switzerland for our 5-night cruise. Day 6 Reach Mahon - Menorca. Day 7 At sea. Day 8 Reach Malaga for Granada. Day 9 Reach Cadiz for Jerez and Seville. Day 10 Reach Casablanca - visit city and onwards to the 4-star Atlas in Marrakesh for three nights. Day 13 Return by air to Gatwick.

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BRITISH AIRWAYS HOLIDAYS



The treasures of Tutankhamun in Dorset? Yes, as good as, complete with animal-headed gods and realistic smells. Emma Houghton goes tomb raiding for a family visit

The Pharaoh of Dorchester

A rural county town may seem an unlikely setting for Egyptian treasure, but the Tutankhamun exhibition in Dorchester, Dorset, offers a compact yet fascinating tribute to one of the greatest archaeological discoveries ever made. This exhibition was put together when damage to the original artefacts prompted the Egyptian government to cease foreign exhibitions, so it replicates (most faithfully) the ancient loot that attracted such huge crowds in the Seventies.

The high point is an atmospheric mock-up of the young king's antechamber and tomb. As you walk in, your senses are assailed by herbal smells that recall the unguents and aromatic oils used in the original tomb, and by the voluptuous beauty of the treasure it contained. The antechamber shows exactly how these riches were arranged when Howard Carter first broke into it in 1922; curiously, they seem not so

much displayed as dumped wherever there was space, giving the air of a dusty and forgotten corner of an exclusive junk shop. The burial chamber itself is dominated by the huge gold coffin, captured at the moment that Carter first opened it up to reveal the famous gold mask covering the bandaged mummy.

There are plenty of other exhibits and information on the treasure, including the Rosetta stone and its role in the discovery of the tomb to a fascinating account of the political machinations that rumbled on behind the throne, and may well have led to Tutankhamun's death by murder at the tender age of 18 (though recent research by Professor Robert Brier, of Long Island University, has suggested that the boy king suffered a long, slow death at the hands of his chief adviser). Beyond the spine-tingling atmosphere of the tomb itself, there's a good dose of yuck factor for

the kids, including some rather gruesome photos of Tutankhamun's mummified remains, and a life-size mock-up of his body. Having got their attention, the surrounding displays then get in a bit of education by the back door, covering each stage of the 70 days it took to embalm the body and prepare it for burial.

Some of the most spectacular exhibits are the painstaking replicas of the jewellery and other objects that accompanied the king - the opulent solid gold collars, the richly decorated pendants and amulets, and most famous of all, the gold mask which came to epitomise this most romantic of all discoveries for the world.

But it's perhaps the religious figures - the jackal Anubis, god of embalming; Hathor, the cow-headed goddess; and the hawk-headed god Horus - that steal the show, their eerie and inscrutable majesty still as potent today as it

must have been nearly 3,000 years ago.

The visitors
Lisa Faiers took her three children, Ned, seven, Monty, five, and Archie, two.

Lisa: I've been to the exhibition once before, and both times I've thoroughly enjoyed it. What I liked best was having all the aromas and the noise in the tomb; it really feels as if you're in there. All in all, the atmosphere feels authentic. I'm sure it's the next best thing to going to Egypt; in fact, it made me feel I wanted to go and see the real thing for myself.

I could have done with several hours of peace and quiet to take it all in. It's maybe better for older children, who can read all the information that's on offer, but, having said that, I can see it's fun for the younger ones as well, especially the mummified body

although it's not a real mummy. But don't take the kids unless they're old enough and brave enough to cope with that, along with being spooked by the strange sensations in the tomb.

I think, if I go again, I'll go over some of the information about Egypt with the boys beforehand, so they are better prepared about things like how a mummy is made.

Monty: The scariest bit was the tomb. It was really dark and spooky. It smells horrible, and the music scared me, but the rest didn't. I liked the wily on the mummy, the golden chair in the tomb and the people with the stabbars - I think they're called spears. They were golden. I liked the person who had a whole mask which was an Egyptian head, and I liked the golden dog.

The Egyptians were people who were around a long, long time ago. They built mud houses and Pyramids,

and they had flat teeth because sand and stones blew into their bread from the desert. I wouldn't really want to live in Egypt, though, because I'd be dead by now.

Ned: I liked seeing the treasures and looking at the mask. It was a sort of golden face with a long blue beard, but I'm not sure he looked like that in real life. It was exciting to see the mummified body. His teeth and toes were all white where you could see the bones sticking out. The pretend tomb was good, too; it was really smelly.

I really like the Egyptians. They lived in Egypt most of the time and they liked treasures, and they didn't like killing animals - in fact they worshipped snakes and scarab beetles. Tutankhamun was an Egyptian king but he was only 18 when he died. I really enjoyed it at the exhibition and it made me think I'd quite like to go to Egypt, too.

Medallion man: detail from Tutankhamun's tomb
Photograph: Asdon

The deal
Getting there: the Tutankhamun Exhibition (01305 269571) is in High Street West in Dorchester town centre.

Opening times: daily 9.30am-5.30pm, except for three days at Christmas.

Admission: adults £3.50, children over five £2.25. A family ticket for two adults and two children costs £9.95.

Facilities: There is a well stocked shop, including books covering every aspect of ancient Egyptian civilisation and all kinds of Egyptian paraphernalia, activities and novelties for both children and adults.

Access: A ramp enables wheelchairs to negotiate two steps; thereafter the exhibition is on the flat.

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Travel advertising continues on page 6.

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Parting shots



Selecting the third and final tranche of photographs from The Independent/Wanderlust/Nikon Travel Photograph of the Year competition has been almost as agonising as being gored during an Andalusian bull run. Forty photographs were highly commended by the judges, but only a few can appear here. We have chosen three images in which the photographer has been working close to the limit.

Colin Woods' shot of the west face of the Aiguille de Plan in the French Alps (below right) shows the rewards of testing the limits of endurance. The painful instant (left) that Jim Sherwood captured at the town of Vejer de la Frontera one Easter Sunday was achieved by pushing for the best vantage point as well as technical perfection. Paul Franklin's wide-eyed picture of a young mountain gorilla in Burundi, meanwhile, tested the limits of mutual respect between subject and photographer.

Our competition has proved such a success that it will be run again this year. Look out for details in *The Independent* and *Wanderlust* magazine in the autumn; for a subscription to *Wanderlust*, call 01753 620426.



RED CHANNEL

Travel advice on Egypt ... from the Foreign Office
In a major incident near Luxor on 17 November 1997, gunmen killed 58 tourists, including six British nationals.

Since 1992 extremists have conducted a campaign of violence against the Egyptian government, mainly in the provinces of Minya and Assiut (half-way between Cairo and Luxor) but with sporadic attacks in other areas. Most of these incidents have been directed at the police, or were sectarian in nature.

In April 1996 gunmen killed 18 Greek tourists in Cairo. On 18 September 1997, two men, acting alone, killed 10 people, mainly German tourists, also in Cairo. Since the Luxor incident extremists groups have threatened further attacks against tourists; these threats should be taken seriously. Visitors to all parts of Egypt are advised to be vigilant, and to respect any advice from the local security authorities.

Visitors are advised to exercise great caution when visiting the Nile Valley south of and including Minya Province. Local driving conditions and poor vehicle maintenance make road travel outside the main cities hazardous, especially at night. In the

event of an accident or emergency, medical facilities are limited. (Foreign Office Travel Advice Unit, 0171-238 4503 or <http://www.fco.gov.uk> or see Ceefax on BBC2, p470 onwards)

... from the US State Department
For the past several years, Egyptian extremist groups seeking to destabilise the government have attacked targets in Egypt, including Egyptian police, security officials and tourists. Most of these attacks have occurred in the Nile Valley provinces of Minya, Assiut, Sohag and Dena. There was one major attack in Cairo in 1996, and another in September 1997, in which tourists were targeted and killed. In November 1997, there was a major attack at a tourist site near Luxor in Upper Egypt, in which 58 tourists were killed. As a result of the attacks on tourists, Egyptian authorities have enhanced security measures to protect tourists in Egypt. Nevertheless, the potential for terrorist attacks exists, and American citizens should exercise caution throughout Egypt. Because the extremists have been more active in the Nile Valley governorates of Minya, Assiut, Sohag, and Dena (north of Dena City), these areas should be considered a greater risk.

Yes, I trust these men to sell me a Pyramid

The massacre in Luxor last year, in which 58 tourists died, was a disaster for Egypt's tourist industry. But, as Douglas Hurd writes, the impressive security that now surrounds some of the most glorious sights in the world should encourage people to visit them – and soon, before the Sphinx, the Pyramids and the Valleys of the Kings and the Queens are once more heaving with crowds of tourists

"Hello, Mr Hurd. We're from Witney."

"When did you book this holiday?"
"Just a day or two after the terrorist shootings. We thought that Luxor would now be one of the safest places in the world to take a holiday."

In the spring sunshine, exploring the Valley of the Queens, astounded once again by the huge pillars at Karnak, and walking the elegant, empty corridors of the Winter Palace Hotel, it was hard to disagree with my former constituents. I was there with an American and an Italian colleague to look at the security precautions which the Egyptians put in place after the shooting of tourists in Luxor last November. We visited the three sites that attract the greatest number of tourists: the Pyramids and the Sphinx, the Egyptian museum in Cairo, and Luxor. We can say nothing about other sites, and of course no one can guarantee safety at any site, but we were impressed by the thoroughness of the Egyptian reaction to that disaster.

President Mubarak at once sacked his minister of the interior, the governor of Luxor, and others whom he held responsible for the security failure last November. New, brisk,

serious men have been installed in their place. Each of the sites now has a security plan including control of access, completely new systems of patrolling, unity of command and communications, and new attention to the quality and training of the security forces.

At first the remaining tourists complained that the security presence was too oppressive. So the sharpshooters have been removed from obvious positions, and you have to look carefully at the hillsides to spot them and the small tents which are their homes. It is reassuring rather than alarming to see camel patrols of armed police moving in line among the dunes behind the Pyramids.

It was a strange experience to be briefed in one ear by a lady archaeologist about the latest discoveries, and simultaneously in the other ear by the police general about his security plan. We were struck by how ready the Egyptians were to receive ideas from outside.

In our report to the new minister of the interior, we emphasised above all the need for consistency. It is one thing to have in place new systems and new men to execute them. It is another to maintain those systems and those men in full effectiveness after six or 12

months without further incident. Staleness leads to slackness, to the cutting of corners, to a lapse back into the dozy ways of the past.

The Egyptians have made an impressive effort. They know that they have to regain confidence in the security of the main tourist attractions if they are to save the livelihoods of the thousands of Egyptians whose jobs depend on visitors.

At the moment Luxor is an amazingly attractive place to visit, without crowds, without noise. The Egyptians hope that the crowds will return. Their success will depend on constant testing and supervision of the men and methods now in place.

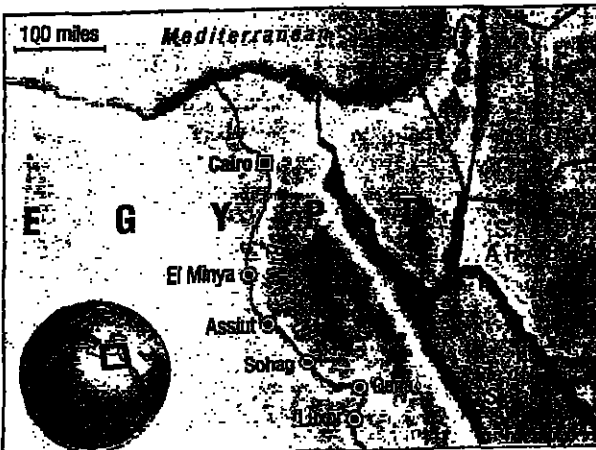
The second British couple I met in Luxor came from Leeds. This was the fifth visit which the mother had made to what she considers the most extraordinary sight in the world.

"Now at last I understand what Mum's been going on about all these years," said the daughter.

That is the reaction which the Egyptians hope for. They deserve luck, and will above all need persistence to keep it that way.



Slowly down the Nile: security is now tight but visitors miss the former laidback charm



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THE EXPERIENCE IS THE DIFFERENCE

There's more to skiing than screaming down the black runs and scaring the life out of your nearest and dearest. David Bowen took a gentler route across country – and found a few natural bonuses along the way

The ibex is a strange beast, with great, curving horns almost as long as its stumpy legs. Though it was on a ledge on the mountain opposite, and we had no binoculars, there was no mistaking those horns. We tramped back through the forest, following a path trodden in the snow by some maniacs who were climbing frozen waterfalls further up the valley. We passed a couple of elderly locals, the first people we had seen for an hour. They lent us their binoculars and, yes, there was the ibex with its horns. Funny looking things, ibexes.

The funnier thing was that we were supposed to be on a skiing holiday.

We were indeed on a skiing holiday – but not the sort where we and 1,000 others went up a mountain slowly and came down it fast. This was cross-country skiing, the gentle cousin of downhill.

One of its advantages is that you can, if you want, take off your skis and go ice skating instead. No pressure, no lift queues – and shoes that are more like comfy trainers than Neil Armstrong's number 12s.

Cross-country skiing is the original form of skiing – indeed, it was the only form until some plucky Brits built the first ski lifts 100 years or so ago. It has many names: cross-country, *langlauf*, *ski de fond* and – here in Italy – *sci nordico*. In some places it is still



The flat of the land

just a way of getting about, but in Italy it has developed into a sport with at least some of the trappings of the downhill jobby.

We were staying in Cogne, in the Aosta Valley – not much known among downhill skiers (though there is a cable car, and some of the emptiest pistes in Christendom), but a great centre for cross-country skiing. The day after we left, 1,300 skiers were to take part in the Marcia Gran Paradiso, a 45-km slog to the ends of three valleys, then back to the centre. The ski trails were hardly crowded, but most of the people we did see were in full Lycra-clad training mode. My wife and I felt like a couple of Morris Minors that had strayed on to a practice session at Silverstone – but the Ferraris were good humoured, hopping out of the prepared tracks and whooshing past us with-

out any opprobrious (or, at least, audibly opprobrious) comments.

We had chosen to go cross-country skiing because we wanted to ski but were of quite different standards downhill, so would not otherwise have spent much time together. We decided, slightly nervously, to ignore those who told us that cross-country was the most exhausting sport there is none of our informants had in fact tried it. Remarkably few British people have – principally, I suspect, because it is not offered by any of the big travel companies. I eventually tracked down Intravel, an admirably efficient operation in York that specialises in slightly offbeat holidays, and had a number of cross-country options.

We chose Cogne mainly because it looked pretty in the brochure, but also be-

cause Italy is a rather safer bet than France for vegetarians (of whom my wife is one). It all worked beautifully. The first nice surprise was that after the first day, a Sunday, Cogne became peaceful almost to point of somnolence: a real Alpine village rather than a ski resort. It gets crowded only at weekends, when cars with Turin number plates pour in. We spent hours sitting in a bar inhabited by locals playing cards. We could have spent days.

Secondly, the food was excellent (few problems for a veggie, not least in the three-star Hotel San'Orso where we stayed). A bonus for non-Italian-speakers is that almost everyone in the Aosta valley speaks French – an inheritance from the time when it was part of the kingdom of Savoy.

Thirdly, the skiing was gently puffing,

but not exhausting. The equipment was delightfully light compared with that for downhill skiing: the comfy shoes clipped at the front on to slim skis. We spent an hour with an instructor, which was plenty for the basics. If you can walk, you can ski across country.

It is possible to ski on unprepared snow, but we stuck to the tracks, which are "bashed" daily. These are a combination of rail and road: you can either fit your skis into the twin grooves that run along each track, or you can go freestyle on the flat section. You are most likely to do the latter either if you are skilled enough to "skate", or if you need more control going up or down a hill.

Hills are the only potential source of disaster. Uphill involves "herringboning", or

cross-country skiing is the original form of the sport – indeed, it was the only form until some plucky Brits built the first ski lifts 100 years or so ago. In some places it is still just a way of getting about, but in Italy it has developed into a sport with at least some of the trappings of the downhill equivalent

putting your skis in V formation and waddling – surprisingly, not too exhausting. Downhill requires variations on the snow plough – but because the track can be narrow, anything more than a gentle incline can be alarming. At least you can take your skis off and walk.

In our week's skiing, we found only one seriously bothersome slope. It was worth it, though, because it led back into the village of Lillaz from the valley of Valleille beyond. This was a magical place – frozen waterfalls to either side, in the middle a bubbling stream straddled by wafer-thin bridges of ice, and complete silence. Well, almost complete: the occasional Ferrari whooshed past, more intent on reaching the finishing line than staring ibex-hopefully at the crags. We looked for ibexes, we looked for chamois and we looked for golden eagles. During the week we saw them all – but then we were Morris Minors, not Ferraris.

David Bowen paid £500 through Intravel (01453 628811) for the week's cross-country skiing in Italy. The price included return flight to Geneva, train and taxi transfers and three-star, half-board accommodation.

For snow reports, see page 19

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aged by staff from the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and with us was John Morris, the service's local project officer. When we downed tools for a cup of tea, perching around a gas ring on precipitous turf, he explained that grazing by cattle or sheep is by far the best means of maintaining rough grassland, with its distinctive flowers and insects, and he spoke lyrically of plans to seek a lottery grant for the purchase of a "flying flock" of sheep, which would eat its way round important sites in the county.

Back at work, Jan Devon kept everyone going with a skilful mixture of instruction, encouragement and cajolery, switching people to new jobs whenever they began to look dispirited. As he described the variety of seasonal tasks that come up — coppicing, hedge-laying, dry-stone walling, tree-planting — he said admiringly, "These volunteers are more effective than a lot of paid workers. They're more meticulous. They look at a site, say, 'Right!' and really get their teeth into it."

In the evening they did just that to the Jew's ears - and it seemed a poor reward for effort expended that the result was so disappointing.

Next morning they were all still on their feet - yet everyone agreed that the gastronomic experiment had been a severe let-down. They'd done their best with *butter, salt, pepper and garlic*, but the fungus had resisted attack. "It just lay there in the frying-pan and looked at us," said one of them. "And in the end it tasted like old polystyrene."

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Dennis Davis/GP

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What on earth's going wrong?

Manufacturers say that cars are becoming more and more reliable. So how come the annual breakdown figures never change? James Ruppert reports on a survey that shows up the chief culprits

Cars are getting better all the time, or so we are told - safer, more environment-friendly, with better fuel consumption, higher build quality - and, of course, they are more reliable than ever.

Well, maybe not. The jury is very much out on that last point because, according to a reliability survey by Lex, the chances of breaking down in your company car this year are currently one in four. If you think that is worrying, back in 1997 it was only a one-in-five chance. That now poses the question of just why cars seem to be getting more unreliable.

The report makes fascinating reading, based as it is on assessing the mechanical reliability of Lex Vehicle Leasing's 88,048 strong fleet. Over a 12-month period Lex drivers experienced 21,620 mechanical faults. That is an average of 24.5 breakdowns per 100 vehicles.

All driver-induced faults - such as flat batteries and road traffic accidents, plus alarm/immobiliser faults - were taken out of the statistics. Only manufacturers with more than 300 vehicles on the Lex fleet were included. Looking at the winners and losers in this survey, the initial conclusion would be that if you are behind the wheel of a Japanese or a German car, the chances of coming to an unscheduled stop are reassuringly remote. Mitsubishi comes out top, with just 5.8 breakdowns per 100 vehicles. Astonishingly, Jaguar

comes second with 7 breakdowns, followed by all the usual ultra-reliable suspects: BMW (8.2), Honda (9.7) and Audi (10). Another big surprise was Fiat's showing of 11 breakdowns in 100. But probably the main area of interest to every driver and customer is just how badly certain volume and prestige manufacturers did. Ford scored a lowly 31.9, Vauxhall did even worse, at 32.2, and Rover, which, let's not forget, is now a BMW subsidiary, chalked up a truly terrible average of 34.7. And the German company's off-road operation, Land Rover, performed just as poorly, at 25.8, the abysmal Discovery accounting for the majority of breakdowns.

Yet those traditional bastions of build quality Volvo (21.3) and Mercedes (13.4) were adjudged to have performed less than brilliantly. Whilst Mercedes's now obsolete 190 has been the model of reliability, its successor, the C class, has encountered all sorts of niggly problems. So what is going on? Or rather, going wrong? A good place to start would be the manufacturers.

Black marks for Rover and Land Rover, who both failed to get back to me. I can't help wondering whether their tardiness in telephone etiquette has some connection with the quality of their products. Over at Volvo a spokeswoman said: "The results do not reflect our own findings. We can point to the 1997 car quality summary report which covered cars up to two years old, and Volvo customers were more satisfied



Discovered: In the Lex survey, the Land Rover Discovery accounted for the majority of breakdowns

than they have ever been. The Lex survey was based on high-mileage business users, not the typical Volvo driver."

Mercedes had a similar line: "Our findings do not show that cars are becoming worse. Just look at the service intervals for our vehicles, which have been extended from 6,000 to 9,000 miles, and now the computer tells you when it needs servicing, which potentially means a 12,000 to 15,000 window."

"And anyway, the Lex survey included commercial vehicles, which work much harder than passenger cars. We make vans, BMW and Jaguar don't."

Obviously manufacturers don't like this sort of survey, but it is the rescue services that have to pick up the pieces. At the RAC, Peter Brill had an inter-

esting statistic of his own. "Our volume of breakdowns never reduces. We deal with 3 million a year, and our findings suggest that mechanically, cars are in fact much more reliable. The majority of breakdowns are caused by failure of consumable items, such as tyres and batteries, or can be traced to driver error. In fact our number one call out is a flat battery, followed by alternators, and then wheel changes."

The AA says that increasingly complex alarm and electrical systems, and even the pressures of modern living, contribute to breakdowns. Michael Harlow, managing director of ABS, a company that inspects and values used cars, says: "I don't think that cars in themselves are getting any less reliable, but there must

be a human element, in that people become over-confident and expect their cars to run faultlessly."

But Mr Harlow has evidence that the 16-valve engines fitted to Vauxhalls are causing trouble.

"Vectra, Corsa, Astra and Tigra engines have insufficient inlet valve clearance," he claims, "which is a pretty fundamental oversight in the design. In my opinion, the car-buying public is carrying out around 5 to 10 per cent of the manufacturer's development work. In the first few years of a new model's life, most customers are simply debugging them." Manufacturers may not think that their cars are becoming any less reliable. However, the driving public may be reaching a different conclusion.



More room for improvement

Roadtest: John Simister drives the new BMW 318i

Oh, the trials of success. You make a product which everybody wants, which achieves an almost iconic status in its market - and then it's time to replace it because you know you can make a better one. What do you do? Strike out in a bold, new direction in the hope that your customers admire your design ethos so much that they will follow you come what may? Or play safe, building on what went before, lest you kill the goose that laid the golden eggs? You will see from the picture that BMW has gone for caution. The new 3-series, set to be the most-bought BMW of all, looks a lot like the old one. Nearly everything has changed in the new car, but only slightly. BMW's stylists, masterminded by the American Chris Bangle,

would be mortified to hear such an assertion of conservatism, but a creator always finds it difficult to stand back from the creation. Bangle could point - has pointed - at the rounded cut-outs for the headlamp lenses, at the tapering ridge along the side sills, at the way the so-called "double kidney" front grille is now built into the bonnet (I've never seen kidneys that shape), at the stepped rear lights reminiscent of those found on the previous 5-series model - but the visual deal is fundamentally the same.

Where's the progress, then? It's more a case of rewarding loyalty, achieved by giving buyers enough extra space in the back for the 3-series no longer to be laughably cramped, greatly improving the car's ability to cocoon its occupants in a crash, building it better, making it quieter, and causing it to need less maintenance. The frontal structure can absorb more than 60 per cent more

crash energy before the passenger compartment caves in, and every version comes with eight airbags. There are two in the front, as normal; one in each door panel; and, on each side, one secreted in the windscreen pillar and above the front doors, which bursts forth as a giant sausage.

There's no doubt that the new car is better. It feels better the moment you sit in it: it's lighter, airier, made of better-quality materials. All versions have electric seat adjustment, and you can programme up to three keys separately to adjust the driver's seat automatically to suit the key owner's preferences, on unlocking the car.

Also standard are "corner brake control", a system which automatically adjusts the braking effort on each wheel to help you keep control when braking in a slippery bend; and a traction-control system to help stop the rear wheels from slipping their grip away, because

all BMWs are still rear-wheel-driven.

The new range starts as a four-door saloon, so the current Coupé, Compact and Touring continue for a while. As before there are sweet-spinning six-cylinder engines towards the top of the range (320i, 323i - 2.5-litres, in fact - and 328i), and humble four-cylinder versions lower down. One of these is a powerful and efficient new diesel, with direct injection, another is the engine that powers what has always been the mainstay of the 3-series range, the most attainable of the aspirational, the 318i.

This engine has grown from 1.8 litres to 1.9, though the name hasn't grown with it, and now incorporates a pair of balancer shafts to make it run more smoothly. Yet it still has just eight valves in its cylinder head instead of the now-usual 16, an odd result for a company as purportedly technologically on the pace as BMW. "Drive it," says

BMW's head of research and development, Dr Wolfgang Reitzle. "You'll see it doesn't need 16 valves."

So we'll do just that. The new engine is indeed smoother - slightly - but it doesn't fire your senses with enthusiasm the way the six-cylinder engines, or the eager, sonorous 16-valve in the rival Alfa 156 can. If this is a good car, it's good despite its engine rather than partly because of it. And I find myself thinking that the virtues of this BMW, this interpretation of the "ultimate driving machine" as BMWs ads would have it, are rather passive. It's quiet. It's beautifully made. It looks good, if a little ornate. It holds the road well, its rear-wheel drive helping to give a satisfying launch out of corners, but it steers without the precision and sensitivity you might have expected, given that the front wheels have nothing to do but guide the car's nose. And it rides over bumps with greater suppleness and discipline than its predecessor.

In the end, it's all rather anodyne. This would be a great car to own, and no doubt to be seen to own, but as a car for the technically-informed lover of driving, it misses the mark. Could BMW be losing its way? Come September, when the new 3-series goes on sale here, you can judge for yourself.

BMW 318i

Specifications

Price: from £19,500 approx.
Engine: 1,895cc, four cylinders, eight valves, 181bhp at 5,500rpm. Five-speed gearbox, rear-wheel drive. Top speed 128mph, 0-60 in 10.1sec, 31-36mpg.

Rivals

Alfa 156 2.0 Twin Spark: £19,777. Strikingly original looks, and an eager fizz that the BMW lacks.

Audi A4 1.8: £19,01. The car that stole the thunder from the old 3-series. Still desirable, but cramped in the back.

Citroën Xantia 2.0 Exclusive: £18,250. Just facelifted, well-equipped and now impressively refined as well as technically intriguing with its hydropneumatic suspension.

Mercedes-Benz C180: £19,990. Lacks power and equipment compared with BMW, but that badge still counts for a lot.

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MY WORST CAR: PAUL HEINEY'S RANGE ROVER

In the early Eighties it was one of the trappings of moving to the country - you had to buy a Range Rover to fit in. But first of all I bought a very ancient Land Rover which proved to be incredibly faithful and utterly reliable.

Unfortunately, the lure of the Range Rover proved too great, and that was how I came to own my worst car.

I suppose I should have realised that this white Range Rover would turn out to be a white elephant, because it was so suspiciously cheap in the first place. The biggest problem it had was getting all eight cylinders to fire in some sort of logical sequence, and that led to an endless series of breakdowns. The fault could never properly be detected, and after about 30



miles the car would just come to a halt. I found that I had to jump out, lift the bonnet, remove the distributor cap, then put it back on to get it running again. Then I had a stroke of luck, and smashed it up.

Towing a horse box one day, it jackknifed and got badly

damaged. No one was hurt, but I was happy because I thought the insurance company would write it off.

They didn't. The assessor looked at the mess and reckoned that the car could be rebuilt, but that didn't make it any more reliable. I advertised it in the local paper and I had a response from a collector of vintage Rolls-Royces.

Rather than tax them all, he wanted to tow them to shows and thought that the Range Rover would be ideal. And so it proved, because when I took him for a test drive it behaved itself impeccably. I felt a pang of guilt when he paid over the money, but thought no more about it until I got a phone call that evening.

It was the chap who had bought the Range Rover, and

he had broken down on the way back to Ipswich. I waited for a torrent of abuse, but it never came because he couldn't have been happier. He liked nothing more than tinkering under the bonnet and taking the engine to bits to find out what the problem was.

I had learned my lesson, so once I had got rid of that horrible Range Rover I went and did the decent thing and bought, for £1,000, a very old Series 3 Land Rover which has never let me down.

Paul Heiney has been a national radio and television presenter since 1975 and has written widely on farming and country matters. His new novel, *Domino's Effect*, is published in April by Hodder & Stoughton, price £16.99.

Camellias: all or nothing

A dash of realism is needed for successful cultivation of these temperamental beauties, as **Anna Pavord** found from bitter experience

Camellias are like computers. If you create exactly the right programme, they will whirr away with no problems. If there is a tiny maladjustment in the schedule, they go to pieces. After struggling for years to persuade them that they like my basically alkaline garden, I now grow a few in tubs and let the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew astound me with the rest.

The earliest outdoor varieties have been blooming for the past month between the Victoria Gate and the Lion Gate at Kew. They have also been lighting up masses of town gardens, seeming to do particularly well in shady, rather dark basements. Camellias are seductive creatures, but before you succumb completely, ask yourself a few important questions.

First of all: soil. Have you got what it takes to produce a healthy plant with shiny dark green foliage and plenty of flowers? Camellias like an acid soil between pH5 and 6.5. I thought, by excavating a 4ft x 4ft pit and filling it with the best acid mixture I could make, that I could fool my camellias into thinking they were at home.

For a few years it worked, with the help of doses of Sequestrene. Then gradually they began to mope, until I dug them up and gave them to a friend with a classic piece of acid woodland. Lining the pit with

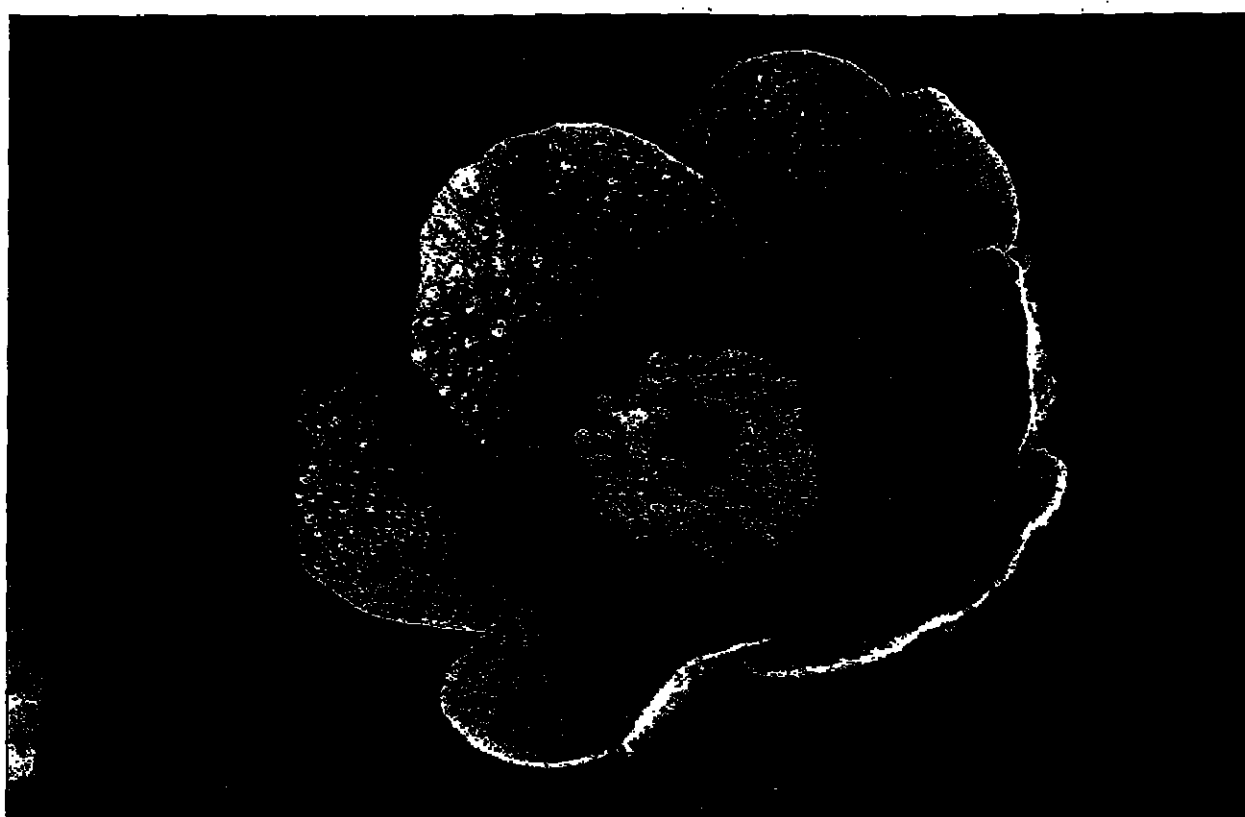
polythene may have put off the day of reckoning. The best camellia soils are not only acid, but also rich in humus. Leaf mould is ideal.

The second big question is where to plant. In the wild, camellias grow under the protection of a high forest canopy, and the principle of sheltered shade is one to hang on to in the garden. They will stand up to an occasional gale, but hate continuous draughts. The soil needs to be moist, but not soggy. A north-facing wall, in a sheltered courtyard, will be ideal. Avoid a position, such as an east-facing wall, where early sun may catch frost-bound blooms and brown them off.

Having found the right spot, the next hurdle will be to select a variety that is more likely to thrive than not. Of the several thousand kinds available, more than half will be too tender to grow successfully outside in the UK. A different half have such violent colours that you would not want them anyway.

Generally, go for varieties of *Camellia* *x* *williamsii* and *C. japonica*. *C. sasanqua* and *C. reticulata* types will be better under glass. Then check flower types, sorted into groups such as single, semi-double, anemone form, full peony form and so on. The more complicated sorts are unlikely to weather well outside. Whites are touchier than reds about frost, wind and wet. For real choice, go to a specialist nursery.

In the north of the country, tough *C. x williamsii* types such as 'J C Williams' (single pale pink) will be the safest choice. Other good ones are 'Brigadoon' (semi-double deep pink), the faithful 'Donation' (semi-double soft pink), Donation's daughter 'Rose Parade' (deep rose peony form) or 'St Ewe' (bright rose-pink single). 'Donation' is the most popular camellia in Britain, in flower from late February through until late April. It is an upright and



Camellia x williamsii
 Photo: Howard Rice/Garden Picture Library

In conservatories, camellias grow most happily without heat, though they will come into flower earlier if the temperature is kept at about 7-10°C (45-50°F). Collect rain water for them. The calcium in tap water is likely to upset them. Plants in pots should be moved outside between May and October.

If they are planted in a conservatory border, allow them to rest for about six weeks after flowering, without food or too much water. Then feed them with weak liquid fertilizer every two weeks until early August, and use the same routine for camellias growing in tubs outside. Sequestrene does not count as food; it is medicine. In open ground, scatter some dried blood round plants in April when the soil is damp, and mulch with fine needles, leaf mould or dead camellia flowers. Some swear by tea leaves. The bags look very drear, because the bag bit doesn't cut the dogm

If you have got the preliminaries right, aftercare will be minimal. Camellias don't need regular pruning, though you can snip off any lopsided shoots in February. Aphids and scale insects may cause sooty mould, which forms on the leaves under the places where the dread pests are quartered. A pesticide will see off the bugs but you may need to wash the leaves, rubbing them gently with your thumbs, to get rid of the mould.

a hand with nitrogen feeds may also inhibit the production of flower buds.

Some varieties, such as 'Bow Bells' and 'Charity', are notably more free-flowering than others. *C. x williamsii* types are the most reliable, although some, such as 'Elsie Jury' and 'Fragrant Pink', need sun to set and ripen their flower buds. Varieties of *C. japonica* may be shy to flower when young, but give a good display after four or five years.

The flower is named after George

Kamel, born in 1661 in Brunn, central Czechoslovakia. He was a Jesuit priest and set up pharmacies for the Jesuits in several of their overseas outposts. Camellias first flowered in England in 1739, when two red-flowered *C. japonica* bloomed in the hot-house at Lord Petre's garden at Thorndon Hall in Essex. The hot-house treatment killed the plants, but fortunately not before the head gardener, James Gordon, had taken cuttings and raised them in his Mile End nursery.

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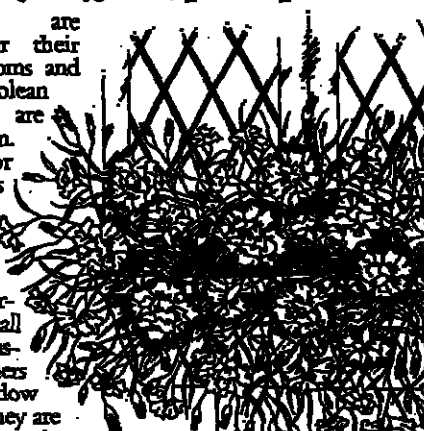
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A taste of ... prunes from Agen in south-western France.

Nikki Spencer samples the finest of dried fruit

In Britain we may regard prunes as mildly amusing, conjuring up images of tweed-clad schoolmistresses keeping themselves regular. In France, however, they take their prunes seriously. So seriously, that in the Lot valley in the heart of Gascony, where they claim they grow the finest prunes in the world, they have a museum dedicated solely to the dried fruit.



the plums, only to find that they ate the fruit as fast as they picked it.

Once the fruit has been harvested, turning a plum into a prune is a special skill. It's not just a question of dehydration, but of cooking the fruit for about 24 hours at such a temperature that it remains succulent and moist, then storing it in wooden boxes for two months so that the prunes gain their deep black colour.

The prunes that many of us were forced to eat as children were usually tinned, or pretty tough and chewy, but modern technology makes it possible for the modern prune to be eaten or used in recipes straight from the packet or the jar, rather than needing to be soaked or drained. And even in the UK we are catching on to the idea. Sales of prunes, particularly from France, have trebled in the last year, according to the supermarket chain J Sainsbury.

Prune place

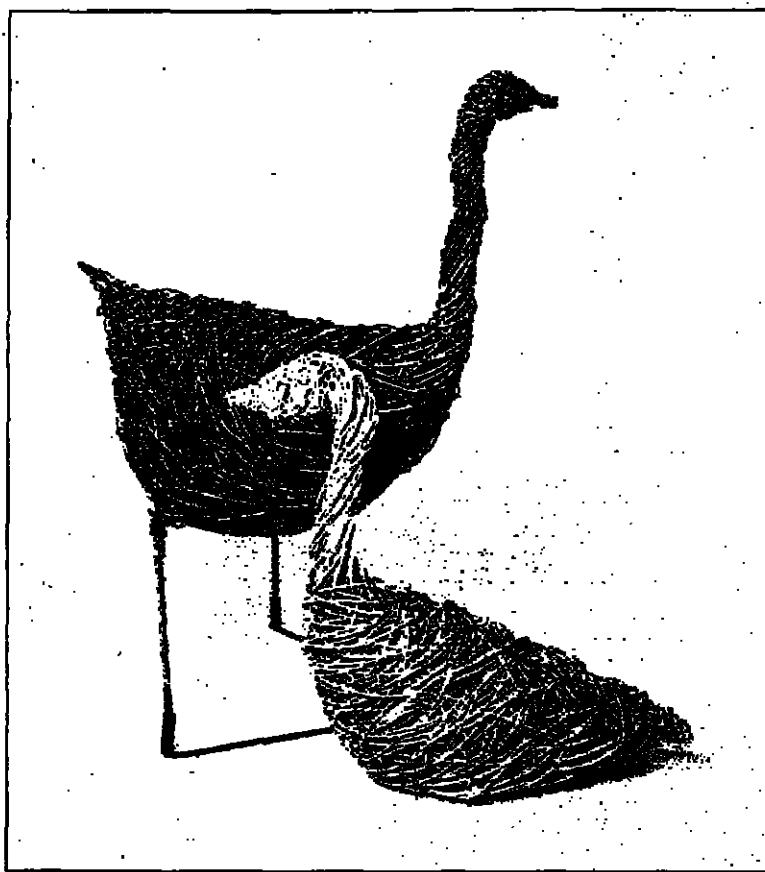
The Prune Museum in Granges sur Lot is about 30 minutes' drive from the bustling port of Agen. It is open all year, except for Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Entrance costs 10F for adults, and is free for children under 10. By prior arrangement the museum will arrange tours of the surrounding farms and orchards. (0033 5 53 84 00 69)

Uses for prunes

• King Henry VIII served prunes as a starter at all his state banquets.
• In Japan prune paste is sold door to door, and is consumed by the teaspoonful as a skin and hair enhancer.

• During the 19th century young ladies were advised to practise saying phrases and words beginning with "P" as an aid to gaining an attractively shaped mouth. A popular phrase mentioned in Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, was "prunes and prisms".

• The California Prune Board, which has declared next week National Prune Week, claims that, as well as being a healthy snack, prunes combined with plenty of fluids can reduce hangover blues. With the endorsement of the Californian model Caprice and the former *Baywatch* actress Alexandra Paul, the board will be encouraging us to sample dishes such as apple and prune strudel, and savoury prune and onion pizza.



Catalogue of simplicity

The stuff of ... natural style. Modern classics by post

Unlikely but true: mail-order catalogues need not cause groans of incredulity at the host of bizarre objects you never knew you couldn't live without. Not, at least, if you look through the pages of Touch Design's brochure. This is heaven for anyone in search of that elusive special present, neat storage unit or garden accessory. Here quality and real originality are the hallmarks. Garden willow sculptures (£180); glass trays (from £69.50); linen cushions (£29.25) - you'll find yourself hard put not to have a sudden, aching need for most of the goods that have been so carefully selected.

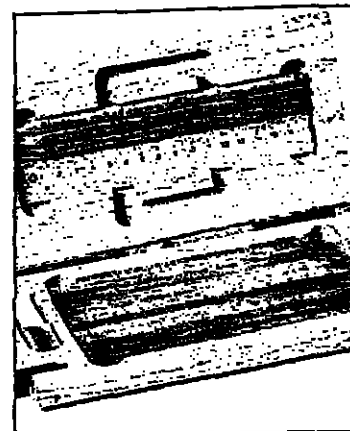
The company is a small, family concern that was started three-and-a-

half years ago by Erica Wolfe-Murray. "It was at a time when most mail-order catalogues were full of imported things - usually fairly shabby stuff, and much of it plastic," she says. "So I decided to get together a selection of goods made from natural materials and in simple shapes - sort of classics, that will go on and on."

Where possible the items are hand-made, mostly in Britain, and nearly all the suppliers are craftspeople who are personally known to Erica. She and her team of two others design about 70 per cent of the products, and they run the packaging and postage side of the business from the West Country village of Sixpenny Handley. Here they also

opened a small shop about 18 months ago. "This has been enormous fun," Erica enthuses. "Customers now tend to bring things in to show us and say, 'Have you ever thought about this?' It's really rewarding talking to them, and realising that there are an increasing number of people who very much appreciate uncomplicated goods that are well made and simply designed."

To order a catalogue from Touch Design, call 01725 552888 or fax 01725 552605. Touch Design's shop at 51 High Street, Sixpenny Handley, near Salisbury, Wiltshire, is open every morning Monday to Saturday and in the afternoon on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.



Well crafted: top left, willow geese garden sculptures by Serena de la Hay, £180 each; top, wall-mounted cone vase £28.75; above, cedarwood pencil box £18.25

GAMES

Every day you may read a new survey telling you what percentage of which group does what to whom how often. To make all such future surveys superfluous, here is a percentage table, all from the last 12 months. The sample population is British unless otherwise stated.

99% of Britons watch television.
98% think contraception should remain free on the NHS.
97% of nurses believe there are staff shortages in their hospitals.
96% of casualty nurses have been verbally abused.
95% of railway stations have no nappy-changing or breast-feeding facilities.
94% of executives say they usually finish a business trip with a sense of accomplishment.
93% of GPs say a new bed can ease back pain.
92% of teenage girls in Middlessex tidy their rooms at least once a week.
91% adults would never agree to wife-swapping.
90% of football fans think the game would benefit from professional referees.
89% think the Millennium Dome is a waste of money.
88% of women say they would not fuss about

their appearance before appearing on TV.
87% of the French think Britain is improving.
86% think sight is the sense we most fear losing.
85% would back a reduction in the drink-drive limit.
84% of bishops can name at least one Spice Girl.
83% of us spend Christmas with our families.
82% of Britons have never heard of Lionel Jospin, the French prime minister.
81% of women think that contraception is mainly a woman's responsibility.
80% of trains have no nappy-changing facilities.
79% of us felt the coverage of Diana's death was sensitive.
78% of car-crimes are thefts from the vehicle.
77% of parents are unhappy with the train service.
76% of Americans think the British are well-informed about current affairs.
75% of working children are employed illegally.
74% of hospital doctors do not expect the NHS to exist in 50 years.
73% of fishermen think hunting should be illegal.
72% of teenagers tidy their rooms once a month or less.
71% of adults think young offenders are let off too lightly.
70% of football fans say statistical analysis

enhances their enjoyment of the game.
69% of wine is bought in supermarkets.
67% of Yorkshire women are still waiting for the sex of their dreams.
66% of women do not feel confident naked.
65% of people hate junk mail.
65% of 35- to 45-year-olds are more financially content than they were in their 20s.
64% of high-achieving women who have had an affair have not regretted it.
63% of victims of car crime are aged 25 to 35.
62% of people blame themselves for marital rows.
61% of men think that contraception is mainly a woman's responsibility.
60% of shoppers say they try to buy British.
59% think big businesses exploits the work force.
58% pay cash for Christmas shopping.
57% of men aged 20-24 have taken illegal drugs.
56% of men in Scotland are too fat.
55% disapprove of banning beef on the bone.
54% back a smoking ban in all public places.
53% want to ban all forms of tobacco sponsorship.
52% of over-50s have life insurance.
51% plan to organise a party for the millennium.
50% of women think they are overweight.
49% of 18-24 year-olds would like to go abroad for Christmas.

48% of teenagers smoke or have tried it.
47% of Scottish women think they are too fat.
46% of 8-to-16-year-olds can't find London on a map.
45% of the total workforce are women.
44% of women feel stressed.
43% of women aged 20-24 have taken drugs.
42% of women high-achievers admit to having had an extra-marital affair.
41% of people over 55 consider themselves lucky.
40% of raw meat sales are chicken.
39% of people touch wood for luck.
38% have not had an eye test in the last two years.
37% think walking under ladders is unlucky.
36% of us made a New Year's resolution.
35% of couples argue more than once a week.
34% of nurses have been attacked while on duty.
33% of households play the midweek lottery.
32% of women high-achievers have no children.
31% are planning to go to a millennium party.
30% of cars in Barnsley are red.
29% of adults have taken a short break holiday.
28% of households are of one person only.
27% of mothers have an epidural anaesthetic.
26% of marital rows take place in the evenings.
25% of women say they think about sex daily.
24% of women think they are not attractive.

23% of executives think new technology has made life more stressful.
22% of women in the Midlands have grey hair.
21% of men would pay £1,000 to set Melinda Messenger free if she were kidnapped.
20% of women say their sex life is fantastic.
19% of us start Christmas shopping in October.
18% vote the Scottish accent their favourite.
17% of New Year's resolutions last less than a day.
16% of men are obese.
15% of the UK population are over 65.
14% do not eat red meat.
13% of breath tests for alcohol are positive.
12% of teenagers' bedrooms have a computer.
11% of Britons say they don't like Germans.
10% of male workers have a female boss.
9% of GP consultations are in the patient's home.
8% of companies are staffed on Christmas Day.
7% of vicars do not have television sets.
6% of cars in Chelsea are Mercedes.
5% of bathroom buyers opt for a bidet.
4% of adults belong to a political party.
3% of consumers do not celebrate Christmas.
2% of executives have returned from a business trip to find they have been sacked.
1% of us made a New Year's resolution to keep a diary.

PANDORA MELLY GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Marguerite Wolff, concert pianist.

My brother tells people that I play all day, which is of course irrefutable. As a concert pianist, one works enormously hard and practises many hours.

My athletic life has always been very limited. I longed to be an elegant tennis player, but of course tennis is tremendously bad for the arm muscles, and skiing is impossible because you can't afford to break anything: it's never the same again, however well it mends. It can make all the difference in the world if you have a break. I think Somerset Maugham wrote a story about somebody who wanted to be a concert pianist. But they lost the tip of their little finger - just the very tip - which made everything impossible.

I had to play tremendously safe with a lot of physical things. I was allowed a rather genteel game of netball, or a little bit of rounders, and that was it. Part of a game after all is the risk you take, isn't it?

If you start playing very young, there's no question about it, you can get wonderful rewards. At times with an orchestra, you can go as near to heaven as you can on this earth, but against that, you give up a tremendous amount of lovely, ordinary things.

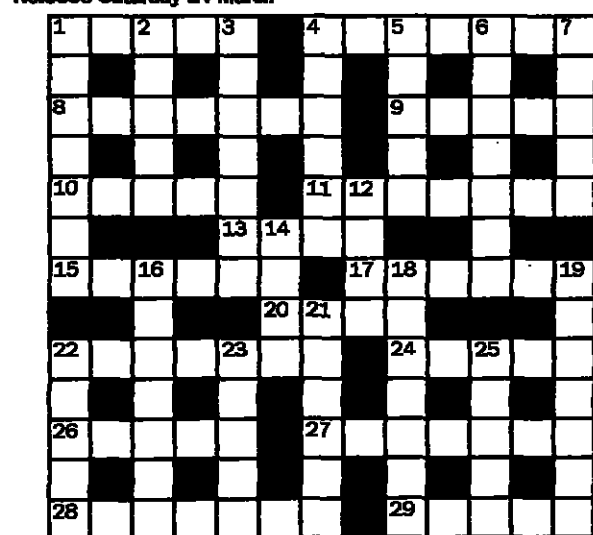
I remember as a child preparing to play a concert. I was about 15, and I'd just been to my piano teacher, who was quite a tyrannical sort of person. It was a hot day and as I stood waiting at the number 31 bus stop, I remember seeing some girls just sauntering along with their tennis rackets. They were obviously having a lovely time without any particular responsibilities or cares, which made me very envious.

I still feel it quite strongly at the number 31 bus stop at Kilburn Bridge.

Marguerite Wolff's biography, *"The Adventures of a Concert Pianist"* is out of print, but determined individuals can follow her progress in Brazil en route to Miami for her 1998 concert series with the National Symphony Orchestra.

CONCISE CROSSWORD

No.3558 Saturday 14 March



ACROSS

- Type of nut (5)
- Mix cards (7)
- Smoker's requisite (7)
- US state (5)
- Kingly (5)
- Set of infant's clothes (7)
- Mislay (4)
- Put in suitcase (6)
- Bird of prey (6)
- It's a deal! (4)
- Come to appreciate (7)
- Theatrical (5)
- Very light brown (5)
- Issue (7)
- Passivity (7)
- Solids left in cup (5)

DOWN

- Supporter of mine? (3-4)
- Taxi driver (5)
- Headlamp housing (7)
- Grinaces (6)
- Oneness (5)
- Blandish (7)
- Run off together (5)
- Long period of time (4)
- Chances (4)
- Communion vessel (7)
- Gull or albatross, e.g. (7)
- Items of male underwear (1-6)
- Accumulation of fluid (6)
- Religious teacher (5)
- Clumsy (5)
- String (5)

Solution to yesterday's Concise Crossword:

ACROSS: 1 Arm, 3 Money (Harmony), 7 Uprising, 8 Tear, 9 Antennae, 10 Edible, 12 Budget, 14 Carving knife, 18 Urdu, 19 Pardoned, 20 Decay, 21 Yet, DOWN: 1 Applaud, 2 Moist, 3 Might, 4 Noticed, 5 Yeast, 6 Blame, 11 Bounce, 12 Bakery, 13 Everest, 15 Acid, 16 Nippy, 17 Irony.

BRIDGE: ALAN HIRON

Love all; dealer South

North
♠ A Q 2
♥ K
♦ K 7 6 2
♣ A K Q J 10

West
♠ J 10 8
♥ Q J 10 8 6
♦ A J 3
♣ 5 3

East
♠ K 9 7 6
♥ J 5 4 3 2
♦ none
♣ 9 8 7 6

A number of old favourites are being republished under the Batsford banner. One such is *Masters and Monsters* by the late Victor Mollo.

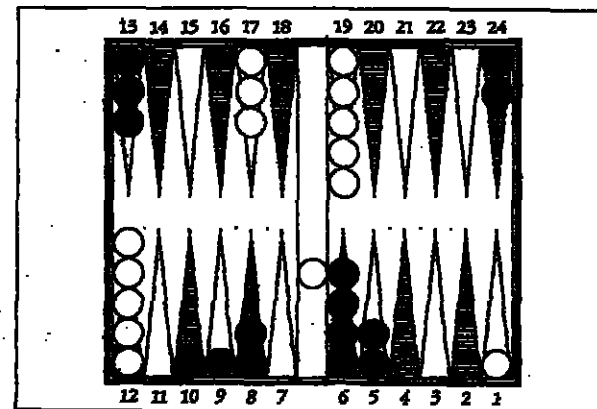
This deal from the book has a curiously simple point. During an exchange of hard luck stories, Karapet (the unluckiest player of all time) described how, after reaching Five Diamonds and getting a heart lead, he "knew" that he was going down.

As he explained: "The contract is unbreakable unless the trumps are 3-0 and then only if East has the void and also SK. And even then you are still home as long as West has three clubs. The odds against everything being wrong must be at least 30:1 and ..."

He was interrupted by the Hideoous Hog who explained that it was not an unlikely hand at all, for he had been fortunate enough to escape a spade lead. After the actual heart lead, the contract was virtually 100 per cent.

Can you see the point that the Hog was making? The secret of the play lies in overtaking the king of hearts with the ace at trick one! Then you lead the ten of diamonds and run it if West plays low. Even if this loses to the singleton jack, East will not be able to attack spades from his side of the table, and the losers are restricted to at most two trump tricks.

BACKGAMMON: CHRIS BRAY



The most difficult question of all: when should you double? The answer would fill a book but let's try to establish some guidelines. First, in terms of game-winning chances it is normally reckoned that somewhere between 67 per cent and 75 per cent is correct. Of course you may not be good at estimating percentages but just ask yourself this: If I had this position 100 times would I be confident of winning at least two games out of every three or possibly even three out of four? If the answer is yes then you should consider doubling.

Second, you should consider how the game might change over the next two rolls. If after your roll and that of your opponent you think he will still have a take, then it is normally correct to wait. If, however, there is a very good chance that he would have to drop, then again you should consider doubling.

Third, never forget you are playing another human being. How will your opponent react to a double? Does he take any double offered? Or does he drop lots of doubles quickly? You must adapt your cube-handling depending upon who you are playing. Knowing your opponent well is a key element to good doubling.

Finally, there is the position itself. The three elements I normally consider are the race, the structure and threats. If you are better in two out of three of these you should normally be considering doubling. Look at the position above. Black opened with a 31 making his 5-point. White rolled 63 and played 24/15 and then Black rolled 43 and played 13/10*, 13/9. White rolled 65 and stayed on the bar. Black now has a very good early-game double. He is ahead in the race, has the better structure and some very real threats. In fact despite this being only the third move of a game White can only just take this double.

صباحنا من الامل



Through a glass brightly

Making it using a mix of modern and medieval traditions, Sally Staples learns how to create stained-glass windows

Just as children like to take a painting home from school, most adults who decide to learn a new craft want to be able to produce a piece of handiwork after a minimal amount of instruction. And one of the pleasures of learning to make stained-glass windows is that you can do just that. After only a day and a half of basic tuition at Earnley Concourse, a residential adult education college in West Sussex, John Reed, a biology teacher, had completed a 10-in-square stained-glass window with a colourful abstract design. The cost of materials was just £8.

"I'm totally impractical – the sort of man who gets someone in to paint the walls – and I have no background in anything artistic," says John. "I'm buying a cottage that has a workshop so I decided to find a hobby, and wanted to give stained glass a try."

"I've never cut glass before; it really is remarkably easy. The most important thing seems to me to start off your design with an accurate drawing."

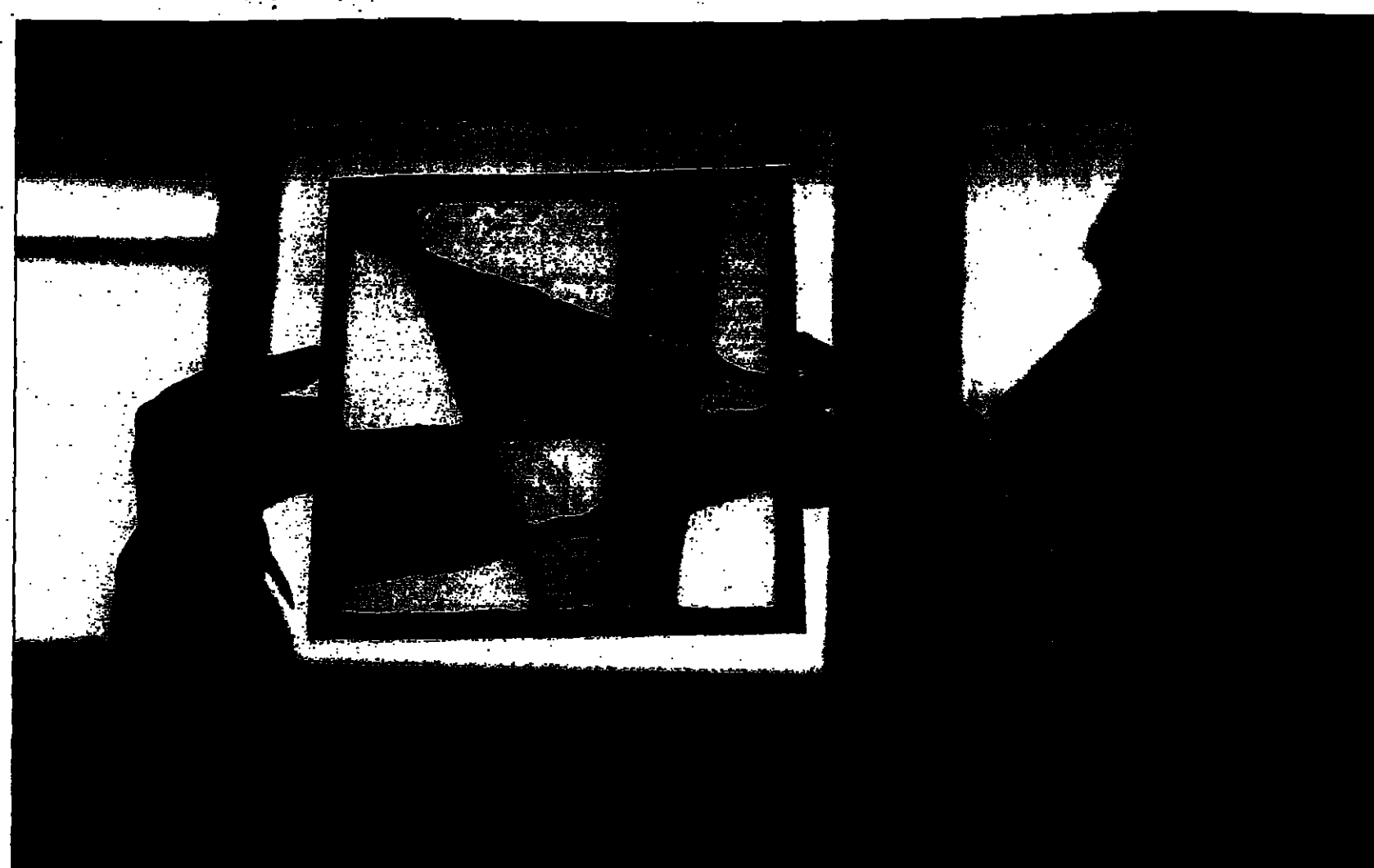
The tutor is Annie Goodman, who has worked on large-scale church window

commissions, and also teaches oil painting. She whizzes round her class of 12 students – men and women of all ages – allowing them to work at their own pace.

"The course is four days, and I start by giving them an idea about the history of glass, and then I tell them to go away and doodle on a pad until they come up with a design they like. Some people naturally prefer an abstract picture; others want a design that looks like the object it is meant to be. Both approaches are fine by me."

"If a student wants to do a recognisable flower in a pot, I will show them how you can stylise the design and get the right colours to form a suitable background. If you use too many reds and blues and heraldic colours it can detract from the main picture, so I talk to the students about the textures and shades of colours when they are shaping their designs."

Once the design has been finalised, it is enlarged to a 10-in square, then drawn again, the second drawing being the "cartoon". It is on this that the glass shapes will



Glass distinction: however simple the design, it is essential to start with an accurately drawn plan

Photograph: John Voos

be cut. Then the fun starts. Annie provides several bucketsful of glass pieces of all sizes, shapes, textures and colours. Each student is supplied with the basic tools: a simple glass-cutter, pair of pliers, an old kitchen knife, a sharp lead-cutting knife, a brush, a lump of tallow candle, strips of lead in two thicknesses, and solder.

Angela Morris, who has come all the way from Alderney to spend a holiday where she could also learn a craft, has sensibly chosen a simple design of sun rays. "I thought it would take weeks to produce a window, but once you are taught the technique of cutting glass you can make good progress," she says. "The nice thing about a residential course like this is that you can make friends, learn something new and have a holiday all at the same time."

Each piece of glass is placed over the

relevant section of the design and held in place with horseshoe nails, then a glass-cutter is run round the outline, just as in tracing. Different thicknesses of glass and varying textures require different pressure when cutting.

Once all the glass pieces have been cut, the lead strip is cut to frame the design and to secure each piece of glass. The lead is malleable, and surprisingly easy to cut. When all the lead and glass pieces are in place, the joining-points are brushed and scraped with tallow: "a medieval tradition which helps the melted solder to spread over the joint," says Annie.

Then the solder iron is heated and used to melt small amounts of solder over the lead joints. Once the soldering on both sides of the window is complete, Annie demonstrates the final touch to en-

sure that windows are rattle proof.

Rolling up her sleeves, she dips her hand into a pot of black grouting cement made up of linseed oil, white spirit, black paint and whiting. This is the messy bit, but a request to use rubber gloves from a faintheart at the back of the class is firmly refused.

The liquid cement is rubbed with a finger under each piece of lead to eliminate any cracks. This is done on both sides of the window, which should then be wiped thoroughly with newspaper. It will take a few days for the cement to set hard.

Dr Sydney Aynsworth, from Gosport, had been stuck on ideas for a design but was inspired by a picture on TV of a road winding away into the distance and a flashing Balisha beacon in the foreground – and has managed to reproduce the image in glass. He and his wife Gisela, also

on the course, are hoping to insert their windows into fanlights at home.

Other students were working on stained-glass panels with house numbers, and Pamela Wilks, from Emsworth in Hampshire, had designed a brightly coloured clown which she planned to hang against a large picture window in her house to deter birds from trying to fly through the glass.

A four-day residential course at Earnley Concourse, Earnley, Chichester, West Sussex PO20 7JL (01243 670392) costs £218 for full board and all the college's facilities including swimming pool. Non-residents pay £144. Annie Goodman teaches similar courses at The Old Rectory, Fittleworth, near Pulborough in Sussex (01798 865306). Further information on stained glass classes can be obtained from local education authorities.

Tailor-made in wood

Flat-packs, DIY – forget it. Commission a cabinet for a perfect fit. Rhianon Batten finds the man for the job

Whether you are the sort of stripped-pine aficionado beloved of the stand-up comic in need of material, or simply want to replace that maddening self-assembly wardrobe whose doors have never quite met, you could well be hitting the high-street furniture stores today. But finding something to fit that tricky alcove precisely could be a square peg/round hole scenario that you could well do without. Fortunately, custom-made furniture need not come with a dizzyingly exclusive price tag.

Believing that a gap existed in the market for bespoke furniture, Andrew Stanley began woodworking business in London's East End in 1989. The prices are serious – recent commissions include an oak bookcase, at £2,100, double wardrobe in English oak, at £2,400, and a maple sitting-room unit for £3,400 – but the absence of high overheads and store rentals means that they bear comparison with off-the-

peg prices. Furthermore, you get a degree of control: specific prices, of course, depend on chosen materials as well as size and fitting.

Since Mr Stanley and his colleagues are as concerned with the pleasure of working with wood as with turning a profit, they will take on almost anything. "We even made a bath and hand-basin out of teak last year. It was, in fact, a great success," he says. "Much of our work is undertaken for architects. I suppose the most eccentric architect's commission we've had recently was replacing a classical column on the exterior of a house; somehow, it had been stolen. Of course, we also work direct for retail customers, and we keep our costs down because pieces are sold direct to the customer rather than through a shop."

When a customer comes to a bespoke furniture maker, the company will discuss a design and then produce an illustration

and an estimate. "On approval, I'll do a final drawing," says Mr Stanley, "mainly to check the functionality of it all; it's essential to get right details of things such as drawers." This is partly because there is precious little room for error. The cost of raw materials is about one-third of the price of the finished product. For some woods, such as teak, and for sprayed, pigmented lacquer finishes, the cost can be even higher.

From agreement of the plan to completion of the commission will take about eight weeks, depending on materials and labour. Some self-assembly wardrobes seem to take that long.

Andrew Stanley himself started working life as an accountant, but found creative carpentry more to his liking. One of his first orders in those early years was for a set of 66 leather and oak chairs to be installed in the Great Hall of Lincoln's Inn in central London. The work was produced to

match the original period furniture; this has become something of a feature of the company's, and is often a requirement of clients.

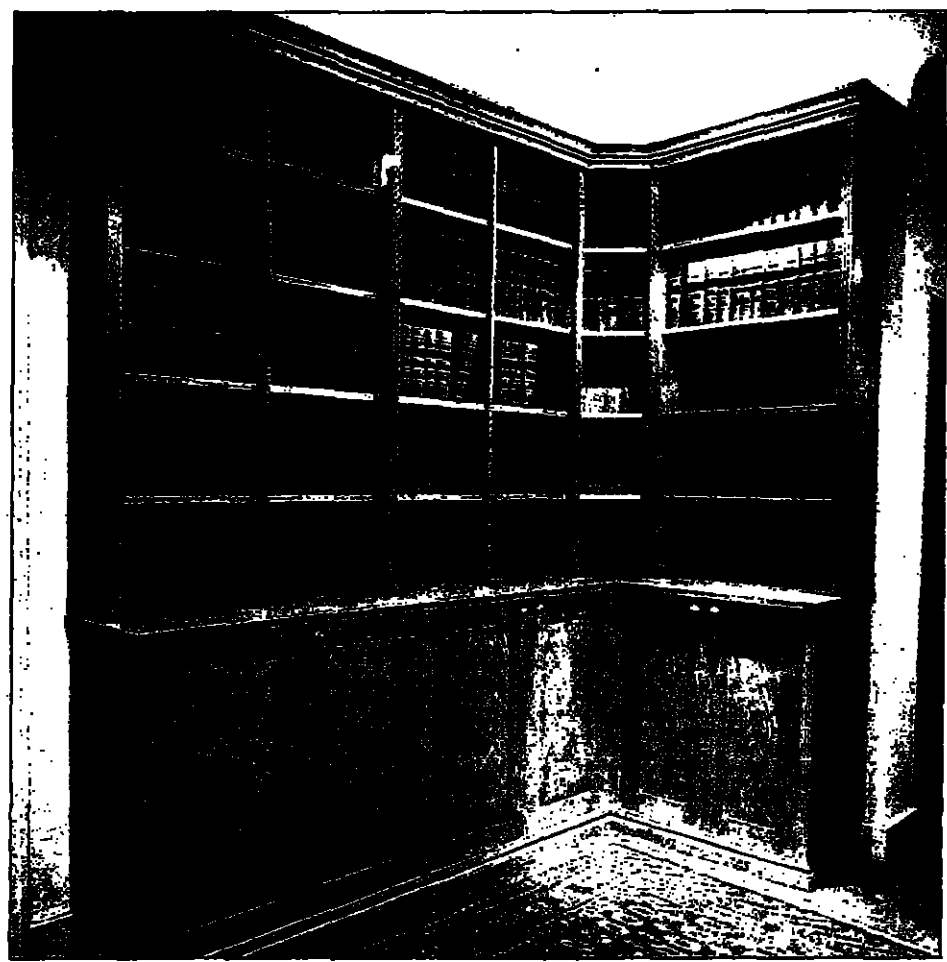
The Nineties have brought their own problems to be solved. Mr Stanley says that much thought has to be given to work such as disguising computer trunking behind Gothic panels, and building secret panels into furniture. It is this variety, he adds, that is one of the main joys of his job – he relishes the prospect of a challenge.

Producing similar pieces of furniture time after time is a less attractive option for Mr Stanley than, for example, time spent puzzling over a job for the cloakrooms of the Middle Temple, in the legal hub of the capital. The difficulty to be grappled with here was the designer's vision of suspended timber shapes supported by glass and steel – "it was intriguing to implement this," says Mr Stanley.

The company's finished

pieces vary enormously in both scope and style. Walking around the workshop, you are just as likely to come across solid, elegant and understated shelving units for a modern warehouse conversion as you are to find the flamboyant excesses of a ceremonial table inlaid with solid silver. Much of the work revolves around cabinet-making but orders can also consist of more mundane window frames, doors and cupboards. Mr Stanley is keen to point out his tradesmanlike approach, whereby pieces are primarily functional rather than artistic. "Without imposing on a client's taste, I try to guide the non expert towards designs I know from experience will work and will suit the building," says Mr Stanley. But if you insist upon stripped pine – that's no problem.

Andrew Stanley Woodworking is at 64 King's Yard, off Carpenter's Road, London E15 2HD (telephone and fax: 0181-533 6199).



Plane and simple: one of Andrew Stanley's traditional oak bookcases – priced at £2100

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196 179

How the start of the game turns perfection into poverty



MIKE ROWBOTTOM

ON THE GULF BETWEEN TRAINING AND COMPETITION

YOU notice it most obviously with footballers, I think. There they are on the pitch, still wearing their tracksuits, bursting into impressive, zig-zagging sprints and flicking the ball about with a disdain reminiscent of Alfredo Di Stefano. The goalkeeper is a marvel of competence as he deals dismissively with every practice shot, clutching this effort, watching with a hint of scorn as another passes inches wide of his post. The lumbering central defender picks a ball up on his foot as if it is attached to his boot, lifts it into the air and playfully allows it to settle on his bear-like shoulders. What a team. Pity the opponents. Although, on inspection, they are doing much the same thing. What a match in prospect, then...

Ten minutes later, the jugglers have turned to oafs and the pitch is given over to dull industry. The referee blows his whistle. And something happened. There are so many wistful tales told of phenomenal sporting performances produced outside competition. Athletics, with its literal measures of achievement, produces large numbers of them. Before Roger Bannister became the first man to break four minutes for the mile, there were stories that his great Australian rival, John Landy, had already done so in training. Sergei Bubka, the phenominal Ukrainian pole vaulter, has long been rumoured to have achieved heights well above his official world records while practising. High jumpers report prodigious clearances in training; javelin throwers reflect upon monster throws, throws which weren't measured but which must have been, oh, well over 90 metres. Easily.

Relaxation, a crucial part of athletic endeavour, comes easily when it doesn't matter. But the same is true in the realm of the unathletic competitor. I once interviewed Eric Bristow about the affliction which had undermined his position as the world's leading dart thrower - dartsitis. We spoke in the warm-up area beside the stage at the world championships in Frimley Green. I had just watched Bristow tip handful after handful of darts into the treble 20 on the board behind his table. The Crafty Cockney appeared to be at his peak. But he knew otherwise. And, when he got out on to the board, he faltered. Anybody who has ever competed at anything could sympathise. At such times, I often think with a rush of shame of my own lamentable failings in competitive conditions. One excruciating example comes to mind more often than others - the final of a table tennis competition which I reached while on holiday as a young teenager. It was one of those grim occasions when parents and interested parties were invited, and my own family dutifully turned up to watch me partake in what must surely have been one of the most dismal sporting spectacles ever witnessed. I knew - from informal practice - I had the measure of my smaller, younger opponent. But as the match progressed, I became assailed with a kind of palsy. When, to everyone's relief, the match ended, I had won. But in truth, my opponent had simply lost even more disastrously than I had.

Responding positively to the those two little words - game on - is the key to any sporting achievement. It is not surprising that sports psychology is a huge growth area. Increasingly, the world's sporting arenas are filling with jargon as competitors strive to win the battle of the mind. According to this new orthodoxy, you must strive every day for focus; you must cast all negativity from your soul; and you must seek a state of grace which shall hereinafter be known as "The Zone". At last month's winter Olympics, I asked a member of the Canadian women's ice hockey team how she and her colleagues were reacting to the fact that they had come into the competition as favourites. Her previously open face clouded over as she executed Mental Gameplan One. "Pressure doesn't exist in our vocabulary," she said.

A startling tactic. Deny the existence of a thing, and it disappears. Excellent. But why stop there? Why not deny the existence of defeat? As things turned out, the Canadians lost the final to their keenest rivals, the United States. They may have managed to keep pressure out of their vocabulary, but they couldn't exclude it from their minds. Three cheers for that. Because watching competitors cope with the anxiety, doubt and the cold fear which pressure trails in its wake is one of the most compelling elements of any sporting spectacle. Those pre-match jugglers need to turn into oafs for the real jugglers' worth to become apparent.

Betts puts his shoulder to the wheel for Wigan

WHEN Denis Betts catches himself talking about shouldering new responsibilities at Wigan, he winces at the recent memory of what his shoulder has put him through. No doubt it will all seem worthwhile at his second coming for Wigan in the Challenge Cup tie against St Helens tomorrow, but he has suffered to make it possible. It all started last October in Brisbane when Betts, playing for the Auckland Warriors but already scheduled for a return to England this season, lined up a tackle on Broncos' Peter Ryan. He got it wrong. "He came in at me and then went away. I was reaching for him and his knee caught me right in the shoulder," Betts says. "It came out of the socket and went straight back in again, which was the good part. The bad part was that the muscles around it were gone. "I tried to get off the field, but they didn't seem to want to take me off and, being the prat I was, I went back into the defensive line and found myself trying to stop a try by pulling the man down with one arm."

It hurt enough watching the tape of that moment and hearing commentators who were unaware of what he had done talking about typical English tackling. It was destined to hurt a lot more. Major surgery involved stitching chest muscles back together and tightening the ligaments and tendons to hold everything in place. "What I've had to do since then is stretch everything again," Betts says. "It doesn't want to stretch, so it's not a nice thing to have to do. It's been two sessions a day with the physio and real, tear-jerking pain. "I got really, really depressed with getting up every morning and knowing it would just be pain and more pain - and that there were months to go."

On top of that, there were the whispers that Wigan had not only signed an over-priced player, but a crippled one as well. The cost of bringing Betts back home is the stuff of rugby league legend. Accurate figures are elusive, but suffice it to say that when the new regime took over at Central Park they were sufficiently taken aback to start looking for ways out of the commitment. The arrival of Dave Whelan and his unfathomably deep pockets has averted that crisis, but Betts says that he never felt under any added pressure because of the price on his head. "I get paid what people will pay me," he says. "I'm getting what the market said I was worth."

But what are Wigan getting? "I'm a better player now than when I left Wigan," the 28-year-old Betts says. "I'm more mature, I've experienced the biggest competition in the game and I'm a little bit more worldly-wise." Betts' globetrotting has not brought him undiluted approval. There were those in Auckland who believed he fell short of justifying his status as the Warriors' biggest signing. "The people who count knew the effort I was putting into a struggling side," he says. "I was having to play a different type of game. We had two young props and I was taking the ball more up the middle."



Denis Betts: Fit again after enduring 'pain and more pain'

Photograph: Allsport

Crowther ready for clash of cousins

By Dave Hadfield

THE close links between Sheffield and Castleford will be underlined today when cousins Matt Crowther and Jason Flowers hurdle into each other. Crowther, one of Sheffield's contingent of Castleford-born players, is a recent convert to the left wing. If he gets around the outside of the Cas defence, it will be their full-back Flowers who will have the responsibility of stopping him. "If he gets through, he'll go

right over the top of him," says the Eagles' coach, John Kear. "Matt has the ability to become a top-class winger this season." Flowers, the scorer of his side's winning try against Bradford in the last round, will have other ideas about that, but Cas are treating the unfashionable Eagles as potentially more dangerous opponents than the vanquished Leeds and Bradford. Judiciously strengthened and full of purpose and optimism, Sheffield do indeed represent a tricky hurdle. Although

their reputation is as a tenacious, workmanlike side, the addition of Dave Watson at stand-off and the presence of Crowther on one wing and Nick Pinkney on the other hint at a more expansive approach. The London Broncos got the draw they wanted, in the shape of First Division Hull Kingston Rovers, but they will be hoping for more cohesion in their play and better support at The Stoop than they got against Halifax in the last round. That was an unconvincing victory, showing that

London have still to gel on the pitch. With that - and the threat of Rovers' explosive Stanley Gene - in mind the Broncos will play Peter Gill at stand-off, with Terry Matterson at loose forward and Robbie Beazley returning at hooker. They should be good enough - and a poster campaign should bring in a better crowd than the disappointing 3,000 who watched the Halifax game - but need to be wary of the goal-kicking of Mike Fletcher.

Weekend fixture guide

TODAY	
Football	3.00 unless stated
GIA VALDHAAL CONFERENCE	
Hednesford v Halifax	
Northwich v Macclesfield	
Widley v Leam	
Woking v Rushden	
Yeovil v Shrewsbury	

FA UMBRO TROPHY FOURTH ROUND	
Chesham v Hayes	
Don v Barnet	
Grays v Southport	
Stevenage v Slough	
FA CARLSBERG VASE SEMI-FINALS FIRST LEG	
Thurton v Kidsgrove	
Thurton v Kidsgrove	
RYMAN LEAGUE PREMIER DIVISION	
Aylesbury v Wycombe	
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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

● The England women cricketers were continually referred to as lesbians and dykes... They said one woman needed to have her legs spread open with a cricket bat. Theresa Harford, former Lords receptionist, who won her sex discrimination case this week.

● You cannot take him seriously any longer. I don't know where he's going next but if it's Malta then he's next. Mafta should stage the World Cup. Wolfgang Niersbach, German football federation spokesman, on Joao Havelange's apparent support for England's 2006 World Cup bid.

● I think I am who I am, hopefully, and that's the way it is. Colin Montgomerie, golfer.

Whose

Whose game is it anyway?

Another week, another round of bloodletting in English rugby union's open civil war. If it wasn't so pathetic it would be funny, writes Chris Hewett

START by taking all the available hypocrisy, chicanery, secrecy and misinformation and mix in some power politics, a pinch of paranoia and a dash of playground petulance. Now add a monster helping of self-importance, season with a few outright lies – great big whoppers of the barefaced variety are very much in season – and hey presto, there you have it: English rugby union, 1998-style. Half Watergate, half Alan Partridge.

Thanks to the chronic mistrust between the major players in the internecine struggle between the professional clubs and their governing body, the standard of debate has been puerile in the extreme. There was an illuminating moment last Monday when Fran Cotton, one of the few central characters in this ongoing pantomime to retain a sense of humour, reacted to allegations by Chris Wright, the millionaire owner of Wasps, that he had been actively luring fresh-faced teenagers away from the contractual clutches of talent-hunting Premiership outfits. "Bloody hell," muttered the Rugby Football Union's vice-chairman. "They've called me a bully, they've accused me of ethnic cleansing and now they want to do me for importing. Where will it all end?"

Where indeed? This much is certain: there will be no semblance of a conclusion while Cliff Brittle, chairman of the RFU's management board, continues to massage his various obsessions in public. Twice this week, Brittle has given vent to his feelings in the most extraordinary fashion, charging the clubs with all manner of seditious and dirty-trickery before, in the very next instant, brandishing leaked copies of private letters written by his *belles*, Sir John Hall, and boasting of "holes" deep in the heart of the Premiership axis. Openness, honesty and integrity, eh?

Yet if the game is no nearer a solution, the issues have at least been crystallised. Two contrasting ideals stand side by side in the public domain – Cotton's wide-ranging "Club England" document and the owner-investors' "Club Charter" – and while the cynics have been quick to point out that rugby literature now contains more visions than the Old Testament, there is no better catalyst for substantive negotiations than the publication of rival blueprints. As Cotton agreed during his careful, if ultimately bad-tempered pre-



What Fran Cotton wants

- England should play seven matches during the domestic season, all of them inside mutually agreed release periods. Autumn internationals on a phased rather than block basis and the Five Nations to be moved to the spring. Tours to be negotiated.
- Development of new European competitions, wholly managed by an association of clubs in full control of sponsorship and broadcasting rights. No divisional or provincial rugby.
- All players to agree standard contracts with the clubs rather than the union. International release periods for training and matches to be built in on agreement with the England management. Clubs to recommend a maximum number of games for Test players.
- A 14-club Premiership starting from next season. One automatic promotion place from Allied Dunbar Premiership Two in 1998-99, with a play-off between the Second Division runners-up and the 13th club in the top flight.
- Establishment of the Premiership clubs as an independent organisation operating under RFU auspices. Broadcasting and sponsorship deals to be negotiated by clubs rather than union.
- The creation of a Supporters' Charter, including pledges to upgrade facilities and the expansion of links with local schools and junior clubs, phased in on a timetable beginning in 1999-2000.

What the clubs want

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owners, including Dallaglio's employers at Wasps, have dismissed those deals as so much bullshite. Wisely, Dallaglio has maintained an almost regal silence on the subject, but some of his senior international colleagues, notably Jeremy Guscott, have backed the status quo. Cotton has an awful lot of persuading to do if he is to win them over.

Only slightly less important but much more urgent is the collision over Europe. The clubs say next season's Heineken Cup is a financial disaster waiting to happen and want no part of it. Cotton considers it a gem of a competition which, were it to involve rather more English-qualified players, might even persuade him to shelve his long-standing passion for divisional rugby. As things stand, the players will reach the start of next season with two different fixture lists on the table. Chaos, or what?

There are a million and one other points of conflict. Foremost among them are the clubs' declared intention of establishing themselves as an independent body with negotiating rights over broadcasting and sponsorship deals; their proposal to shift the Five Nations' Championship to a new starting date in mid-spring; and Cotton's radical and spectacularly inflammatory franchise plan, which would deny some of the biggest clubs in England a place in their own Premiership.

But the central argument is a philosophical one concerning the precise nature, the very essence, of the game in this country. In a magazine article published this week, Brittle let slip his guard by saying: "The total financial success of the RFU depends on one thing, the success of England. People are not interested in the clubs. What people are interested in is the national team."

If he is right – if domestic rugby is driven by Woodward's team and that alone – Cotton is perfectly justified in his revolutionary replanting of the English rugby landscape.

His ideology has been drawn largely from the orthodoxy currently in vogue in New Zealand, where the All Black jersey carries all before it, the Super 12 provinces are tightly controlled by NZRFU appointees and the National Provincial Championship, the bread and butter domestic competition, grows more marginalised by the day. This year, 95 per cent of the All Black squad will be ordered to rest rather than play in the NPC.

Which is all fine and dandy unless, like thousands of regular rugby supporters from Bath in the South-west to Newcastle in the North-east, you happen to think that the traditional tribalism of English club rugby is something to cherish. Some £30m worth of investment says that Hall, Wright, Nigel Wray, Keith Barwell and their fellow owners believe club rugby to be central to the overall package, not peripheral. If nothing else, they deserve to be treated like grown-ups. Are you listening, Mr Brittle?

sentation at Twickenham on Thursday, there are a good few acres of common ground between the two camps. Both sides recognise the central importance of the England national team to the well-being of the domestic game, both agree that the Premiership can and should evolve into the strongest professional club structure in world rugby and both ac-

knowledge the urgent need to act on player burn-out, the issue at the heart of Northampton's laughably mishandled attack on this summer's tour of the southern hemisphere. Cotton wants a 35-game limit for the Test elite while the clubs envisage a maximum of 39.

But this deeply damaging argument is not about the what, but the

how; both documents contain practical, eminently workable proposals that are pure anathema to those on the opposite side of the great divide and without a grand-scale abandonment of carefully considered operational principles, there is no earthly chance of an accommodation. The hottest potato in the sack – a planet-sized King Edward, molten to

the touch – is the contractual wrangle over Clive Woodward's England squad. Cotton is adamant that the best players should sign with the union. "We can never, ever allow a repeat of the Northampton problem," he growled this week – while the clubs, profoundly embarrassed by the Franklins Gardens fiasco but no less convinced of their claim to the moral

high ground, insist on their right to retain the all-important thumbprints, subject to the safeguard of agreed international release periods.

The proof of the pudding will be in the signing, as it were. Although both Brittle and Cotton have denied making any bank-breaking contractual approach to Lawrence Dallaglio, the England captain, the club

Old friends and old enemies send their teams into battle

Scottish RU sign up Metcalfe until the 1999 World Cup

By Chris Hewett

IT used to be the match of the season, a 24-carat bumbler with everything – personal pride, the destination of the league title, the price of bread and the long-term future of the human race – riding on the outcome. Newcastle and Saracens have gatecrashed the private party over the last eight months but whenever Bath and Leicester appear simultaneously on the same rectangle of mud, the competitive fires burn anew. Quite simply, there is no love lost. As Austin Healey, the Leicester Lip, said in January after watching Bath relieve Brive of the Heineken Cup:

"I'm absolutely delighted that an English side can call themselves European champions at last, but why in the name of Christ does it have to be them?" You get the feeling that both clubs would rather nominate Cliff Brittle for the Nobel Peace prize than acknowledge each other's successes.

The Bath coach, Andy Robinson, appeared to be steering well clear of the usual barbed one-upmanship as he assessed the prospects yesterday. "This year's title is out of our hands, just as it's out of Leicester's hands," he pointed out. "We're in the pursuing pack, both of us, and all we can hope to do is win our remaining games and look

for Newcastle and Saracens to slip up somewhere along the way." It was only then that he worked the knife under the Tigers' skin by saying: "Still, at least we've got a trophy from the season." Ouch.

Almost exactly nine years ago, Robinson gathered a perfectly weighted scoring pass from a certain Dean Richards and claimed the try that clinched a famous England victory over the French at Twickenham. Tomorrow, the former back-row confederate will renew their acquaintance on the Recreation Ground tounline as Richards undertakes the most testing challenge of his fledgling coaching career.

Predictably, he was receiving no favours from his rival – Robinson flatly refused to reveal his line-up, commenting that Deano would "have to get used to the little trials that are part and parcel of a coach's life" – and the Leicester legend freely admitted that the new job was turning out to be every bit as demanding as originally feared. It was not made any easier by the sending-off of Martin Cory during last week's derby punch-up with Northampton and yesterday, Richards and his fellow Welford Road chiefs suspended the England flanker for a fortnight.

Newcastle, the title favourites, travel to Richmond this afternoon with a full hand of Scottish

internationals. Doddie Weir, Gary Armstrong and Alan Tait all return after missing the close shave against Sale in midweek and two points against the fast-substituting Londoners will return Rob Andrew and company to the top of the table.

However, the lead will change hands again tomorrow if Saracens survive what is certain to be a hairy afternoon against Gloucester and while Kingsholm is proving to be a real mugger's alley this season, Andrew expects them to do just that. "Both Saracens and ourselves are proving adept at sneaking wins – we've both been squeezing home by four or five points of late – and it's that

ability that is keeping us where we are," he said. "Yes, we've got games in hand. But having them and winning them are two different things. It's a very, very tough Premiership this year."

Tough? Just ask Aadel Kardooni, the former Leicester scrum-half who is – or, rather, was – helping Bedford continue their runaway surge to the Allied Dunbar Premiership Two title. A burglary at Kardooni's flat prevented him from making an important training session at Goldington Road and as a result, Bedford's ever-sympathetic director of rugby, Geoff Cooke, dropped him from today's home game with Wakefield. Charming.

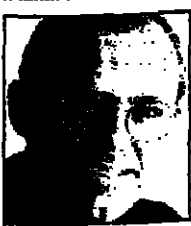
By Chris Hewett

Player contracts may be the insurmountable stumbling block to rugby harmony in England, but the most talked-about prospect in the Scottish game knows exactly which side his bread is buttered. Glenn Metcalfe, a New Zealand-born full-back who can also play on the wing, has signed a deal with the Scottish Rugby Union taking him through to the end of next year's World Cup. Metcalfe, who pitched up at Glasgow Hawks this season via Glasgow Academicals and Waikato, made his Scotland A debut against the Welsh second-string a week ago and cut

enough ice to lure big-spending Newcastle. However, his union deal takes him out of reach of any English Premiership side for another 18 months.

Melrose, meanwhile, will take a decisive step towards a third successive Tennent's Premiership title if they win their first play-off match against West of Scotland at Burnbrae today. Bryan Redpath, Scott Nichol, Scott Aitken, Graham Shiel and Nick Broughton are on their casualty list, but Craig Chalmers and Rowen Shepherd return from international duty and with a 49-7 victory over West already in the bag, the tea-leaves point to another Borders triumph.

The 45 minutes squandered would have been better spent drilling a hole in my skull



CHRIS MAUME

SPORT ON TV

AN open letter to my neighbours: it was me last Monday night, barking those murderous obscenities while I trashed my living room and threw the telly out of the window, I apologise, and promise it won't happen again. You can be sure of that, because I won't be watching *On Side* any more.

You'd think the people responsible (producer Paul Davies, editor Philip Bernie – why shouldn't they be called to account?) might have learnt one or two lessons from the first series a few months ago. But nothing has changed: still too many guests, and still with John Inverdale, the thinking person's Terry Christian, on hand to ensure that questions of any consequence are avoided at all costs.

When you think who the BBC could have press-ganged into lending an air of gravitas, however bogus, it makes you want to sue them for causing emotional distress and mis-

handling our licence money. Des Lyman, Barry Davies... John Inverdale. It reminds me of a poster I saw a couple of years ago for the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park: SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDY OF ERRORS THE TEMPEST PAINT YOUR WAGON

The opening set-piece established the benchmark for fatuousness. They had each of the studio guests, the Nassase, Ashia Hansen and Paul Merson, standing at a swanky bar staring glumly into his or her drink. What was the intention here? Set-ups like this usually have some relevance to the people involved. The only possible connection I could think of is that one of them is a recovering alcoholic – which was surely not what the makers had in mind. What was also strange was the fact that Nassase and Hansen were drinking orange juice,

while Merson, the reformed boozer, had water. Why? Was some kind of significance intended? And why were they told to remain motionless as if paralysed by existential dread? Somebody's idea of adding a spurious resonance to an otherwise catastrophically flimsy show?

First up was Nassase, who was asked virtually nothing of any interest whatsoever. There were a couple of sentences about his aspiring political career in Romania – "If I'd known before what was going on I wouldn't have got into it" – while when asked about sport in post-cold war eastern Europe, he replied, "It's going to die."

They were joined on satellite link by Joe Frazier in Philadelphia, on the anniversary of his victory over Muhammad Ali at Madison Square Garden. Inverdale kicked off with one of those classic quantification ques-

tions so beloved of sports interviewers: "How proud are you to have taken part in that fight?" How do you answer that? "Oh, about 4.3 International Pride Units."

To be fair to Inverdale (if I must), that sort of nonsense is hardly his preserve, but he does have his own special brand of gaucheness. "Can you tell us about your left arm, which is all crooked?" is the kind of question arch piss-taker Chris Morris might have asked on *Brass Eye*, that fabulous news magazine parody from a couple of years ago. It wasn't all bad. There was some nice banter – when Frazier asked Nassase if he could give him some tennis lessons, he replied, "I will if you come to Romania and beat up all the politicians." But the human brain can only take so much fluffiness and cosiness before it explodes. That's my theory, anyway.

There was more of it in Gary

Richardson's interview with Marvin Hagler in Rome. Though it was interesting to see what Marvelous Marvin is up to, establishing a career as a bad guy in Italian action flicks, the mateyness was splattered all over the screen. The Americans talk about "the hairball factor" (think *Friends*), and it's perfectly suited to a programme that seems determined to honour the spirit of the sillier bits of *Sports Review of the Year*.

Hansen and Merson fared no better. Inverdale spending 3min 39sec and 5min 56sec respectively on them. There was more Chris Morris to savour: "There is still something comic about the hop, step and jump", for example. No. No there isn't. His opening gambit with Merson was also a gem, as he inquired what the Midlandsbrough player would do should the First Division Championship trophy be passed round the dressing-

room full of champagne. I was embarrassed for Merson, whose honest, serious approach was horribly offset by the bantering tone. Inverdale wrapped up the interview by telling him, "In the words of the song, you were knocked down and got back up again," a crass and clumsy reference to Chumbawumba's No 1 drinking song. Nice touch, that, when you're interviewing an alcoholic.

He just meant it as a bit of fun, I guess. Maybe it's just me, maybe I've turned into a sour old git, but I want more. I want to be made to think, I want to be surprised. I don't want to feel that the 45 minutes squandered on watching *On Side* would have been better spent drilling a hole in my skull and sucking my brains out. Anybody who required even a minimal sense of having their horizons expanded would have ended up last Monday like me, screaming at the screen.



Dark Blues extend their winning streak

THE 11th women's Varsity rugby union match took place at Ifley Road last Sunday with Oxford extending their sequence of victories to 10 with a comprehensive 22-5 triumph.

It may not quite have been Twickenham, but a healthy crowd enjoyed a rumbustious atmosphere, the beer and the obligatory streaker, whose bravado was, it seems, fuelled at one of Cambridge's drinking societies. With due sense of theatre perhaps, he delayed his entry until the second half and the players apparently found his antics "all jolly good fun".

Oxford's ability to extend their winning streak was helped by a scrum and line-out that had a professional look about them. The Dark Blues former captain Jo Hudson (1995-96, bottom left) must have

enjoyed her view from the touch-line as Oxford overwhelmed their rivals through tries from Jacqui Street, with two, the Swedish international Ulrika Andersson and Lucy Mackillop.

Pre-match attention to detail by the Light Blues (bottom centre) came to nothing in the attempt to curtail the catalogue of catastrophe.

At times Oxford seemed almost to have gained a passing resemblance to the All Blacks or so it may have seemed to spectators, whether inebriated, intrigued or merely enthusiastic.

Copies of these photographs - and any others by the Independent's sports photographers David Ashdown, Peter Jay and Robert Hallam - can be ordered by telephoning 0171-293-2534.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT HALLAM



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Lombardo takes throne at Palace

ITALY have not had much to laugh about at the expense of the English this season ever since our national team jeopardised their World Cup qualification in Rome last October, but there must have been loud guffaws around the board rooms of Serie A clubs yesterday when Crystal Palace announced that they were placing their fate in the hands of the invisible man, Attilio Lombardo, who will act as player-coach until the end of this season, when the club hope that Terry Venables will take over.

A fleeting appearance as substitute in the 6-2 defeat at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday apart, one could be excused for thinking that the Italian had long since left the club, so little has been seen of him, due to a catalogue of injuries since his arrival last summer.

But there he was large as life at the club's ramshackle Mitcham training ground yesterday to hear Steve Coppell, who he replaces, announce to a gobsmacked gathering of English and Italian media that Palace were planning their hopes of survival on a complete novice.

And before the assembly could close their mouths, he added that Lombardo would be assisted by fellow striker Tomas Brodin, who is on a week-to-week contract at the club and has an English appearance record even more limited than Lombardo's.

"I realise it is a bold, massive step," said Coppell, who returns to his role as director of football, "and a step that a lot of people will look upon as being foolish, but something had to be done. It might not work,

An invisible Italian is the new man in charge at Selhurst Park. Clive White reports

but at the moment everyone expects us to go down anyway—it's only the people within these walls who think we've got a fighting chance of staying up."

It is an appointment that is probably par for the course at the moment at a club which seems intent on upstaging itself when it comes to bizarre decisions. Ron Nades, the chairman, and Mark Goldberg, the club's prospective owner, were both conspicuous by their absence (though Goldberg had been at the training ground before the press arrived, possibly practising his ball-juggling skills à la Michael Knighton) and it was left to poor Coppell to field the questions that rained in on him.

He accepted responsibility for the club's plight and the appointment of Lombardo, following consultation with Nades and Goldberg. Recent months at the club had been like "slow strangulation", he said. "In an ideal world I wouldn't be speaking to you — Palace would be in mid-table and I would be manager. But we are drifting down the league and I felt very strongly something had to be done."

"I'm very sad at the club's position and I am responsible, the buck always stops with the manager. I want as much as possible to release Attilio from that kind of pressure. I want him to concentrate on what matters — the preparation of the team — and not get involved in any of the off-the-field politics."

Lombardo was given half an hour to think about the offer, after being summoned to a hotel on Thursday evening by Goldberg. Having agreed, he said through an interpreter, that he felt as if, "the hotel roof was falling in on me." He was still reeling from the magnitude of his decision and hoped that he would not get home and find his wife packing to leave.

He did not envisage too many changes just yet with today's game at Villa Park followed smartly by another, on Wednesday at Newcastle, after which they have 10 days' respite.

He lamented the shortage of midfielders at the club (not helped by the recent sale of Andy Roberts) and will no doubt be relieved to hear that the club is in the process of negotiating the transfer of Sasa Curcic from Aston Villa for £1m on Monday.

The player-coach stressed that it was only a temporary appointment and that he intended to return to being "simply a player" at the end of the season.

It was on Wednesday that Lombardo's fellow countryman and friend, Gianluca Vialli, did his own player-manager career some good with that annihilation of Palace. Lombardo said that he would be ringing Vialli. "Gianluca is in a similar position, although he is driving a Formula One car, as it were, while I'm in charge of a sinking ship," he said. "His advice will help but he will not solve my problems."



Worried look: Lombardo contemplates his appointment yesterday

Photograph: Allsport

BBC lose Gullit to ITV

ITV Sport have signed up Ruud Gullit from under the nose of the BBC for the World Cup. Gullit had been expected to be part of the Beeb's World Cup team this summer, but ITV Sport announced yesterday that they had signed Gullit on a two-year deal to help present ITV's flagship games in the Champions' League and FA Cup as well as France 98 and the 2000 European Championships. Gullit will make his ITV debut at this year's FA Final on 16 May.

Gullit said: "I've enjoyed working with Trevor Brooking, Alan Hansen and Gary Lineker and now I'll be in a very privileged position working with professionals I also respect, such as Bob Wilson, Alex Ferguson, Kevin Keegan and Terry Venables, on ITV."

Robson makes a move for Gascoigne

BRYAN ROBSON has asked Paul Gascoigne's agent, Mel Stein, to sound out the Rangers and England midfielder over a possible move to Middlesbrough.

The Boro manager is a long-standing admirer of Gascoigne and wants Stein to find out if he favours a move back to his North-east roots.

"I have not approached Rangers, or [the Rangers chairman] David Murray, but, as there does seem to be some truth that Rangers will let Gazza go, I have spoken to Stein," Robson said. "I have asked him to find out whether Gazza would be interested. I will find out whether Rangers are interested and that's as much as I am prepared to say."

The Rangers manager Walter Smith insists that Gascoigne, who is sidelined with a calf injury at present, is not being pushed out of Ibrox, despite re-

ports of a loan deal with Crystal Palace.

"Someone has come in so we have looked at the offer and asked Paul: 'How do you feel about that?'" Smith said. "He has one or two considerations outside football to take in which he would not be averse to a move outside Scotland."

"A lot of players are stimulated by new clubs and I think that Paul might be one of those. I think that if he was looking at himself then he may be thinking that at the end of the season fresh pastures would be the right thing for him and good stimulation in the last years of his career."

Howard Kendall fears he could be dragged into an auction over the Chilean midfielder Jose Luis Sierra. The Everton manager had hoped to have the 29-year-old Sierra,

who turned in a brilliant display against England at Wembley recently, in his squad to face Blackburn at Goodison today.

However, protracted negotiations mean the move for the Colo Colo player is on hold. "It seems that people are touting the player around looking for a buyer," Kendall said.

Steve Thompson has made his first signing as Sheffield United manager with the capture of Paul Devlin from Birmingham. The 25-year-old striker will cost the Blades £200,000, plus an additional £50,000 if the club are promoted.

Aberdeen's Eoin Jess is back in the Scotland squad after an absence of 21 months. Jess is now certain to partner Blackburn's Kevin Gallacher up front in the friendly against Denmark at Ibrox on 25 March. Jess's club-mate, the central defend-

er Derek Whyte, is also recalled. He, like Jess, last figured for Scotland in the Euro 96 campaign. Gavin Strachan, the Coventry midfielder and son of the Sky Blues manager, Gordon, is named in the Under 21 squad for the first time.

Liverpool's Mark Kennedy has been ruled out of the Republic of Ireland's friendly international against the Czech Republic in Olomouc on 25 March. The 22-year-old winger has had an operation to correct damaged tendons in his hand and will be out of action for at least three weeks.

SCOTLAND friendly v Denmark, Ibrox, 25 March: Gordon (Rangers), Leighton (Aberdeen), Sullivan (Wendelton); Boyd (Colt), Colquhoun (Dundee), Gully (Dunfermline), Hendry (Blackburn), McNamee (Colt), Watt (Heart of Midlothian), Whyte (Aberdeen), Whyte (Colt), Collins (Aberdeen), Gallacher (Blackburn), Gerrard (Nottingham Forest), Hopkin (Leeds), Lambert (Colt), McCall (Rangers), McInnes (Blackburn), Doolan (Colt), Durie (Rangers), Booth (Borussia Dortmund), Jackson (Colt), Jess (Aberdeen).

Doncaster lay off coaches

DONCASTER ROVERS, who are 12 points adrift at the bottom of the Third Division, have laid off their coaches, Dave Cowling and Paul Ward, as part of a series of cutbacks.

The manager, Mark Weaver, has told the players they are only required to turn up on match-days because there would be nobody to coach them for the rest of the week.

Cowling and Ward had both been working with the first team. The former Stockport and Rotherham boss Danny Bergara will stay on at the club to coach the juniors.

Rovers have also agreed settlements with players Simon Island and Darren Uley to cancel their contracts while their former skipper Ian Gore could also be set to leave.

Middlesbrough asked for more of the same

By Ian Rodgers

BRYAN ROBSON wants more of the same from his side after the 6-0 win over Swindon in midweek. The Middlesbrough manager hopes his side can re-establish themselves as the best away side in the First Division at Portsmouth today after conceding nine goals and scoring none in their last two matches on the road.

"I was pleased with our

overall performance against Swindon in midweek particularly after two bad defeats and nine goals against," Robson said. "We have now got to get back to being the best away team in the First Division."

The Teessiders' rivals for the title, Nottingham Forest, will be aiming to stop Bury's revival at the City Ground. Bury are unbeaten in nine games but Forest want revenge after their defeat at Gigg Lane in November.

From today until the end of the season, referees will indicate to the fourth official how much stoppage time will be played at the end of each half in all Nationwide League games. He will then hold up a board to indicate the minimum amount of time that will be added. The system, which was pioneered in Italy, will also be used in the play-off finals and the Coca-Cola Cup final between Chelsea and Middlesbrough.

Smith sets his mind on resurrecting Rangers

By Bryn Palmer

WALTER SMITH shrugged off speculation over Paul Gascoigne's future yesterday and set his sights on reviving his side's title challenge at Motherwell today. The Rangers manager takes his injury-hit squad to Fir Park for the third time this season knowing they have yet to come away with a victory.

With the England midfielder's future dominating this

week, Smith is anxious to reaffirm that securing a 10th successive Premier Division title remains his priority. Gascoigne and Brian Laudrup will again be missing through injury, both having only an outside chance of being fit for Wednesday's Scottish Cup quarter-final replay at Dundee.

With the loss of the injured Sergio Porrini and Gordon Durie and the suspensions of Richard Gough and Stuart Mo-

Call — apparently for the first time in the midfielder's career — Smith is understandably reticent about discussing Gascoigne's situation further.

"He is still a Rangers player, and by all accounts he might be fit in time for Wednesday," he said. "But, as far as I am concerned, the only problem I have got is tomorrow's game. It is one that we really need to win to keep the pressure up on the two teams above us."

Dye-soaked Gazza is strung up by the ankles



THE GAFFER TAPES

I THINK I've blown our chances of signing Paul Gascoigne, literally, but it was hardly my fault. For weeks now there's been a conspiracy against me. It's not just the usual stuff, our team playing poorly, opposition goalkeepers having blinders, refs only seeing penalties for the other side. After you've been in the game as long as I have you realise every manager thinks that. It goes with the job.

No, this was different. I've been followed, my neighbours have had strange people asking questions about me, vile rumours have been spread. At first I thought it was the Child Support Agency, or a private dick for one of my ex-wives. I've had all that in the past but we're all on good terms at present.

Then I noticed that every Wednesday, the night before the dustmen came, someone was going through my wheelie bin. So I booby-trapped it,

I rigged up a few wires so if it was opened a bucket of purple dye would fall on the perpetrator and one of those man-traps which leave a bloke hanging from a tree by his ankle would whip into action. It was one of those times when my days in the scouts came in handy.

Late that night there was a sudden commotion. I went out to see a chubby figure hanging upside down, red dye dripping from his head, saying "way-eh mon, whif's ga-wan on?" It was Gazza. He'd come round to ask me to sign him.

We'd spoken on the phone earlier. "Only Crystal Palace really want me," he had said. "I'm desperate, I can't go there. Thomas Brodin's already snaffled the seat next to the dinner lady and he's also tuck shop monitor. The dressing-room's not going to be big enough for both of us."

However, just before he knocked on my door he opened

my bin to chuck in a few Mars Bar wrappers... splat.

He took it badly. "I'd rather put up with a Swede than look like a beetroot," he said before storming off in tears. He would have bumped into that bloke from the Premier League's bungs commission as he went, but fortunately the guy had a big pair of rubber gloves on so he was able to keep Gazza away. Funny that he happened to be in the area.

It's a shame though, I even had Josie Havelange's backing for my bid. Good old Jo, he can always be relied upon for patronage, he's now told Germany, Brazil, South Africa, Australia and England they have his support for 2006. He's made a career out of telling people what they want to hear. The incredible thing is, it still works, just look at the headlines this week. You could almost hear "Tone and Mandy thinking 'wow, what an operator'". FIFA has got a few things

right though. Marco rang up this week, he was so emotional he could hardly talk. "At last," he said, "at last". Then he went quiet as he thought of all the tackles from behind that slashed his ankles and finished his beautiful career. "The horror, the horror," he whispered before he put the phone down. They should use a special orange card for these dismissals and name it the Van Basten in his honour.

The decision to ban reserve goalies from joining the squad until summoned is handy as well — it could be a nice little earner. I've formed the World Cup Goalie Camp Pic to accommodate keepers from places like Argentina, Brazil, South Korea and South Africa who are going to be 10-16 hours flying time from France. We're only a few hours by Channel Tunnel so they're much better off staying in Sturgeithorpe.

For a small fee they can kip at the club's youth academy

hostel (the lads will be home as it's off-season). Bruno, down the local caff, has promised to introduce a few foreign recipes such as pasta, rice, curry, quiche and burritos though neither he nor Rover looked too happy when I told him South Koreans eat dog.

Ivor Panic will give them daily training sessions and there's a jogging path along the canal towpath. We're knocking together a brochure and in case all that doesn't work we're including a few pictures of Sweetie Bettie.

Meanwhile, Shaun Prone's out again this week after he argued with me about team selection. He thinks he should be in it. He claims there's a clause in his contract says he has to play but there isn't any longer, the chairman had it drawn up in invisible ink. With Ivor Niggle gone to West Ham on loan I'm down to the bare bones.

Barry Gaffer was talking to Glenn Moore

SIDELINES

Pickering the pick of the switchers

COLIN HENDRY and Chris Sutton could have been playing in each other's positions today had their true vocations not been spotted. Blackburn Rovers' visit to Everton stirs memories of another player who switched roles — and clubs — with striking consequences.

Fred Pickering was a mediocre full-back who Blackburn converted into a centre-forward good enough to land an £85,000 move to Everton 34 years ago this month. There he partnered Roy Vernon, whose talents Rovers had also cashed in on. The timing of Pickering's transfer was disastrous for the Ewood Park club, who had been well placed to win the championship for the first time in 50 years. They had to wait until 1995 to finish top.

Howard Kendall, now in his fourth spell at Everton, was player-manager at both clubs. In 1981, during his first stint in the Goodison hot seat, he went back to Blackburn for his coach, Mick Heston, goalkeeper Jim Arnold, and Glenn "Killer" Keeley, the Hendry of his day, who was sent off half an hour into his one loan appearance (a 5-0 home defeat by Liverpool).

Keith Newton, who himself started in attack, had represented England as a Second Division right-back before Everton bought him from Blackburn. Others with a dual connection include Harry Leyland, Matt Woods, Duncan McKeuzie, John Bailey, Alan Irvine and Bobby Mumms. However, it was not until Kenny Dalglish was united with Jack Walker's wallet in 1991 that Rovers reversed the drain in talent, signing Mike Newell for £1.1m.

THE EX-FILES

Ten things that Arsenal's Liberian Christopher Wreh might be missing today



- 1 His home city, the war-ravaged capital, Monrovia. Like Highbury, its inhabitants would prefer to be elsewhere.
- 2 Gunley Street, the liveliest area in Monrovia for bars and clubs.
- 3 A glass of home brew palm wine, often accompanied in Liberia by a home-grown grass spliff.
- 4 Not the kind of thing that any Gunner would indulge in, of course.
- 5 Swimming, fishing and watersports at Lake Piso.
- 6 A trip to the Firestone rubber plantation, the world's largest. Said to

- be as interesting as Arsenal's sides of the Eighties, but more flexible.
- 6 A day trip to Bangor beach, one of several close to the Liberian capital.
- 7 A bottle of Club beer in a chop bar (roadside cafe).
- 8 Pepper soup and fufu (fermented cassava).
- 9 Buying cheap, quality suits on Benson Street, Monrovia's Saville Row.
- 10 Development plans rooted in reality. President Charles Taylor wants his country to improve "step by step." Arsenal want to buy Wembley stadium.

NAME OF THE GAME

No 26: THE MCCAIN STADIUM

Grounds bearing the name of a sponsor — such as Bolton's Reebok Stadium or Stoke's Britannia Stadium — are a comparatively recent development, but Scarborough changed the name of their home as long ago as 1988. McCain Foods, one of the biggest employers in the town, have sponsored what was the Athletic Ground for 10 years and are expected to renew their agreement when it expires next year.

THIS WEEK

On 13 March 1991, Manchester United travelled to Southampton without a League win for two months.

Trailing the First Division's joint leaders, Arsenal and Liverpool, by 16 points, United were unable to end their lean spell, and managed only a 1-1 draw, with Paul Ince scoring for the visitors after Neil Ruddock had put the Saints ahead.

United's patch of indifferent form (blamed on their preoccupation with European glory) was not the only subject that week to be echoed now. Terry Venables and Paul Gascoigne, both currently being linked to Crystal Palace, were making news seven years ago as well.

Venables' attempt to buy Tottenham put him in the headlines, while Gazza was linked to Lazio, and then moved for £8.5m.

HISTORY LESSON

As Bristol City and Bristol Rovers prepare for their vital Second Division promotion game today, supporters of the two clubs might think back to the 1989-90 season. It was a remarkable year for the Bristol clubs, who finished first and second in the old Third Division.

Their first meeting at Ashton Gate in September finished goalless, but as the season wore on Joe Jordan's City began to set the pace.

City went top in January and, apart from a brief spell in March, stayed there until the penultimate game of the season when they faced their greatest rivals, Gerry Francis's Rovers, who won 1-5 and drew five of their last 21 games, won 3-0 to displace City at the top of the table. Both teams won their final matches and filled the two automatic promotion places.

THIS WEEK'S TRANSFERS

Transfers
Free transfers or undisclosed fees unless stated
Wigan (defender) Olympique (G) to Newcastle (G); Andy Roberts (midfielder) Crystal Palace to Wembley (G); Martin Samuel (goalkeeper) Burnley to Middlesbrough (G); James Clapham (defender) Tottenham to Ipswich (G); Paul Davis (forward) Birmingham to Sheffield Utd (G); Les Maki (midfielder) Huddersfield to Haverhill (G); Jason van der Meer (defender) Manchester City to West Bromwich Albion (G); My Ousene (forward) Gillingham to Swindon; David Karanata (defender) Ipswich to Swindon; O'Neill (defender) Swindon to Sheffield Wed; David (forward) Sheffield Wed to Stoke; Chris Kwameya (forward) Arsenal to Huddersfield; Richard

Johnson (defender) Leeds to Manchester City; Neil Whitehead (defender) Ipswich to Wigan; Julian Alsop (forward) Bristol Rovers to Swindon; Damien Hilton (forward) Norwich to Brighton; Gary Maitland (forward) Notts County to Rotherham; Craig Mackay (forward) Bradford City to Hartlepool.
Loans/trials
Steve Nicol (defender) Sheffield Wed to West Bromwich Albion; Paul Swales (defender) Manchester City to West Bromwich; John Spencer (forward) Queens Park Rangers to Everton; Dave Barnett (defender) Dunfermline to Port Vale; Andy Wallace (forward) Sheffield Utd to Barnsley; Jan Vennhof (defender) Gillingham to Ipswich (trial).

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صباحنا من الامل

Woeful week for stropky Stoichkov

Argentina

A LISTLESS Bulgarian side were beaten 2-0 in a friendly international in Buenos Aires this week - a result which was something of an embarrassment for Bulgaria's top striker, Hristo Stoichkov.

On arrival in Buenos Aires, Stoichkov had said that, without their former captain, Diego Maradona, Argentina "did not exist." The result helped to prove that his statement was somewhat fatuous - and Stoichkov was ineffective and was substituted at the interval.

Stoichkov's replacement, Emil Kostadinov, another veteran forward, fared even worse. He was sent off for elbowing the home defender, Mauricio Pineda. The Fiorentina striker, Gabriel Batistuta, and Valencia's Claudio Lopez scored in each half for Argentina.

There was more bad news for Stoichkov yesterday. Having travelled to Argentina without the permission of his club, Barcelona, he discovered that his contract with the Catalan club had been terminated.

The 36-year-old Maradona, meanwhile, is pondering yet another comeback, this time with an Argentinian Second Division club, All Boys.

"I don't want pressure or problems of any sort, my wish is just to enjoy myself and help the club win promotion," said Maradona, who abandoned his last return with Boca Juniors back in October.

Brazil

THE former national captain Rai was recalled by Brazil for the first time in nearly four years this week, while the volatile striker Edmundo found himself on the sidelines once again.

Rai was one of 12 foreign-based players picked for a friendly away to Germany in Stuttgart on Wednesday week. Edmundo, recalled for last month's Gold Cup after being left in the cold for six months for indiscipline last year, was dropped again, apparently due to his stormy relationship with his Italian club, Fiorentina.



FOOTBALL
AROUND
THE WORLD
BY RUPERT
METCALF

Rai won the last of his 47 caps in the semi-final of the 1994 World Cup against Sweden. The coach, Mario Zagallo, has now given Rai another chance, following his resurgence with the French club, Paris St-Germain. However, Zagallo said: "This does not guarantee him a place in the squad for the World Cup. We must see."

Albania

THE top Albanian club Partizan Tirana are to boycott the league championship because of repeated attacks on players and referees inside stadiums.

Partizan decided on the boycott following an attack on the referee and his assistants in a match last month in Elbasani. The match officials said they were beaten in their changing room by a small group of Elbasani supporters at half-time.

Partizan, in second place in the league, will continue their boycott until the government and the football federation can assure them that violence will be stamped out. They could be relegated to the Second Division if they stick by their decision.

In an unrelated incident, the Partizan coach, Petar Musta, is in a coma in hospital after being shot and seriously wounded. A neighbour in Tirana has allegedly admitted to the crime for "personal reasons".

88 days... and counting until the World Cup finals begin in France

Rene Simoes, the coach of Jamaica, already has six English-born players in his World Cup squad - and he may be about to add some more. "Maybe I can go for 10 overall," he said this week, adding that the Jamaican Football Federation has been inundated with requests from players with a Jamaican heritage hoping to get a late ticket to the World Cup. He refused to give names, citing confidentiality requested by the applicants. However, any newcomer is bound to kick a Jamaican off the team - and Simoes wants to keep the peace. "If it breaks the chemistry, I'll send them [the newcomers] back," the coach promised.

Ajax make move for unsettled Kinkladze

AJAX want to sign the unsettled Manchester City playmaker, Georgi Kinkladze, but nothing will be concluded this weekend, according to City's manager, Joe Royle.

The Dutch clubs have made an inquiry about the Georgian international, who has put in a written transfer request, but no move is imminent and a transfer has not been discussed, Royle said yesterday.

Kinkladze trained with his team-mates yesterday morning, following his recovery from an ankle injury, and will play in tomorrow's First Division relegation six-pointer at Port Vale.

Meanwhile, Royle will speak to the Sheffield Wednesday manager, Ron Atkinson, in the next few days in an attempt to extend Lee Briscoe's loan spell at the club. But the loan move of the defender David Morley to Ayr seems likely to fall through because he needs international clearance.

The Football League chairman, David Sheepshanks, has tried to allay fears that leading First Division clubs are about to form their own super league.

denied reports they are trying to create their own breakaway league to try to bridge the financial gap between the Premier League and Nationwide League. But those sides likely to lose out if the big clubs did go it alone are still fearful of moves they believe would put their future in jeopardy.

However, Sheepshanks has invited representatives from the First Division steering committee and the newly formed Division Two and Three committees to a meeting next week to discuss the future - and is keen to make it clear that he believes that the smaller sides have nothing to fear.

He said: "Talk of breakaways and secret deals have been roundly refuted by Division One themselves and to my knowledge have no foundation whatsoever."

"I've written to all club chairmen urging them not to over-react and to find common ground so that we can complete the positive improvements that we are now close to achieving. "Grassroots football in this country will benefit from a stronger and united Football League."



The Argentinian striker Claudio Lopez (right) finds room to shoot despite the attentions of the Bulgarian defender Iliya Gruev in Tuesday's friendly in Buenos Aires, which Argentina won 2-0. Photograph: AP

Major fixtures and pools check

TODAY

10.00 noon

FA Cup Final

1 Aston Villa v Crystal Palace

2 Burnley v Southampton

3 Bolton v Sheffield Wednesday

4 Everton v Blackburn

5 Manchester Utd v Arsenal (11.5am)

6 Tottenham v Liverpool

7 West Ham v Chelsea

8 Wimbledon v Leicester

Nationwide Football League

First Division

9 Bradford City v Birmingham

10 Huddersfield v Thurston

11 Norwich v West Bromwich

12 Nottingham Forest v Bury

13 Oxford Utd v Stoke

14 Port Vale v Manchester City

15 Portsmouth v Middlesbrough

16 QPR v Swindon

17 Sheffield Utd v Reading

18 Stockport v Ipswich

19 Wolves v Crewe

Second Division

20 Bournemouth v Wrexham

21 Bristol City v Bristol Rovers

22 Burnley v Luton

23 Carlisle v Brentford

24 Fulham v Millwall

25 Gillingham v Chesterfield

26 Grimsby v Walsall

27 Northampton v Blackpool

28 Preston v York

29 Watford v Southend

30 Wigan v Oldham

31 Wycombe v Plymouth

Third Division

32 Barnet v Bognor

33 Cambridge Utd v Southport

34 Cardiff v Doncaster

35 Chester v Notts County

36 Colchester v Macclesfield

37 Darlington v Torquay

38 Exeter v Hull

39 Hartlepool v Swans

40 Lincoln City v Rochdale

41 Rotherham v Mansfield

42 Scarborough v Leyton Orient

43 Shrewsbury v Peterborough

44 St Johnstone v Hibernian

45 Dundee v Marlin

46 Falkirk v Raith

47 Partick v St Mirren

48 Stirling Albion v Hamilton

49 Clyde v Inverness CT

50 Dundee v Livingston

51 Forfar v Stirling Albion

52 Queen of the South v Brechin

53 Albion Rovers v Cowdenbeath

54 Arbroath v Alloa

55 East Fife v Stranraer

56 East Stirling v Berwick Rangers

57 Queen's Park v Dumbarton

58 Ross County v Montrose

59 Celtic v Dundee Utd (5.0)

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A football philosopher à la Cantona

Emmanuel Petit used to think football the most important thing in life. Now he knows better, but as he prepared for this morning's showdown at Old Trafford it was clear he has retained his passion for the game. He spoke to Glenn Moore

SOME players wave to relatives in the crowd, some kick a ball into the net. Emmanuel Petit's pre-match ritual is different. Amid the roar of the crowd at Old Trafford this morning he will stand alone for a few moments and enter a private world. He may pause to cast a few blades of grass into the wind before softly reciting a few words. Then he will join his Arsenal team-mates and prepare to play Manchester United.

The dedication is a poignant memorial to his brother, Olivier, who died at the age of 21 while playing football almost a decade ago. Petit was then a gifted 18-year-old playing for Monaco and already on the verge of international selection. It was a shattering blow to a teenager obsessed with football and he spent years coming to terms with the sport which offered him so much but had taken away so much more.

"When I was young I loved football," he said when we met this week. "I really loved it. It was my whole life. When my brother died my mind changed about football. It was not so important. I had wanted to be a professional footballer for me, now I am a footballer for him." At the time he considered giving up but felt that would not be what his brother would have wished. Now he said he feels his brother, who died from a blood clot on the brain, is watching him when he plays and he draws faith from that belief.

The trauma was made worse for Petit by his living in Monaco while his family were the length of France away in Dieppe. Then, a year later, his father suffered a heart attack while training with his football team. He was rushed to hospital and survived but Petit recalled "for it to again be on a football pitch, it was unbelievable". Petit, himself, underwent many tests to check his health.

We are sitting in the St Albans hotel Arsenal use as a training base and where Petit himself lived for two months before setting up home near Barnet. In the flesh the Arsenal midfielder appears smaller, younger and much friendlier than the unsmiling and intimidating figure he cuts on the pitch. The ponytail is down and his hair hangs loose.

Although an interpreter is with us, Petit uses him just to check the occasional word or phrase. He even does crosswords in English, his desire to absorb the language hastened by his initial sense of isolation after his £3.5m move and Arsène Wenger's habit of speaking English in training.

Wenger was Petit's coach at Monaco and his presence at Highbury obviously encouraged Petit to choose them ahead of other suitors



Thinking footballer's mentor: 'I was very impressed by what he did', Emmanuel Petit says of his compatriot Eric Cantona. 'When I was in the French team we would always sit together, Laurent Blanc, Eric and me. Laurent would say to Eric: "There is your spiritual son"'

Rangers, Valencia and Internazionale this summer. Tottenham were also contenders with Petit memorably borrowing a taxi fare from Alan Sugar to get from White Hart Lane to Highbury during negotiations. Apart from the weather and the

kick-off times - "what next? Five in the morning?" - he likes it here. "I needed a change after 14 years at Monaco. I wanted to know another country. I always liked the English approach to the game - it is still a game, not like Italy and France

where there is so much pressure. The football there so frustrating. "In England you can win or lose anywhere. In France there are about seven big teams and it is very hard to beat them away from home. So even if we lose to Manchester United

it will not be all over, United can still lose games to anyone. "Sometimes I would like to play more football here, some teams just want to kick it, they don't want to play football against us because we would outplay them. But Manchester United

should be good opponents because they always want to play. This is new and good for English football and for the England team." Petit has never been to Old Trafford before - despite growing up in a Channel port he had only been to

England once as a schoolboy - but he is a friend of the local hero. His knowing smile confirms that I am not the first English journalist to ask about Eric Cantona but he is still happy to record his admiration.

"I was very impressed by what he did [in retiring and other matters]. It is rare to meet a player who does exactly what he wants to do, on and off the pitch. He is always thinking. Maybe he is crazy but he knows what he does when he says, 'I f--- you', or when he takes his shirt off [as when he flung his Marseille shirt to the ground when sent off in a charity match]. Some players, they go to Japan or America for the money, he says, 'I stop' - and he does."

"When I was in the French team as a young player we would always sit together, Laurent Blanc, Eric and me. Laurent would say to Eric, 'There is your spiritual son'. He did influence me in small ways but no one can be just like him."

Petit, too, is a man of principle. He caused outrage in France when, while still going through the turmoil of Olivier's death he accused Marseilles of being corrupt - an accusation later confirmed. He appears, again, to have fallen out of favour with Aimé Jacquet, the French manager, though he was reticent about discussing their relationship and still hopes for a recall in time for the World Cup. However, his belief that the French team should "put on a show, a spectacle, a celebration of football and life with mistakes and goals, as in the 3-3 draw with Norway, rather than boring football like chess" is unlikely to meet Jacquet's approval.

He feels his best opportunity of getting in the French team is as a left-sided defensive player and his best position is central defence. Wenger, however, prefers him in midfield. "When he plays there he links in well with the defence, he understands their needs," Wenger said. "He may appear similar to Patrick Vieira but he is more of an interceptor, Vieira is a tackler. Petit finds forwards with long passes whereas Vieira runs with the ball more." Petit has yet to score in 32 matches but Wenger added: "He has improved a lot offensively and we will get goals from him."

Today's match is the sort of occasion Petit came to England for. "At Monaco," he said, recalling the patty-crowds, "you had to motivate yourself. You had to be strong mentally." He went there at 14 in the belief that he needed to be away from his family to make it as a professional player. "It was strange, going from the poor north to Monaco with all the yachts. You might get recognized but you were only a footballer, not a golfer or tennis player," he added with a rude and dismissive gesture. "Football was regarded as the poor man's game."

Petit is a complex figure, secular but with an interest in Buddhism and, like Cantona, confident but introspective. Unusually for a footballer he asked: "What do people think of me?" and he said: "I am still discovering who I am, for a person it is the most important thing to discover about themselves."

In these moments, and when he talks of his first months here, there is a vulnerability which may stem from having to grow up too fast as a teenager. Few opponents, or referees, see this on the pitch however and this morning is likely to be no different.

In pursuit of a long-lasting board game

CONSIDERING that the seemingly endless list of merchandise spawned by the vast industry we used to know as football now includes everything from duvet covers to doormats and dairy products (you can even buy Norwich City milk now, for heaven's sake), it is surprising that we have yet to see a game that has stood the test of time.

The exception, of course, is Subbuteo which, like Jimmy Hill, seems to have been around for ever, whether you like it or not. Subbuteo actually made its debut as far back as 1947 when it was on an old Army blanket using a piece of chalk. In those days the Fifa directives were simpler - the rules addressed nothing more than the assembly of the paper nets and wire-framed goals - but Subbuteo has managed to keep abreast of the changes in the game; "Continental style" keepers appeared in 1969, while Subbuteo's first all-seater stadium was included in the 1976 World Cup edition, 14 years ahead of the real thing.

Over the years there have been endless variations on Subbuteo's theme, but frankly, none have been a patch on the original. There was Striker, which involved pressing a player's head down to make him kick, and Bobby Charlton's

Table Soccer in which you had to twist knobs at the side of the goalmouth to spin little plastic players around on a hard green indented surface (not dissimilar to the pitch in Monaco).

There was also the quaintly simplistic blow football (you never knew you could have so much fun with a straw and ping-pong ball) and the classic table football, once beloved of youth clubs and pubs, but like Chris Waddle you see them only rarely these days (although in certain parts of Italy they apparently recreate a human version of the game using people hanging on to bars).

There have been endless football card games, too, and more recently a board game called The Manager which was successful, but had a rather short shelf life (unlike its creator, Terry Venables, who has enjoyed a long shelf life without being particularly successful).

Of course, part of the problem with football games is that it's almost impossible to do justice to real action; it's far more fulfilling to throw down a couple of jumpers in the back garden and have a kickabout yourself. PC versions have had a pretty good stab at it, but even they, addictive though they are, can't beat the real thing.



OLIVIA BLAIR
ON THE NOT SO TRIVIAL SEARCH FOR A TABLE-TOP WINNER

However, like any current football spin-off they've still been a huge commercial success, and if projected sales figures are anything to go by, it looks as if much the same will soon apply to the World Cup edition of Trivial Pursuit, the latest offspring of the original version of the board game.

Vinnie Jones, for one, reckons "it's a classy product". Wimbledon's captain was present at the launch along with George Best, although Melinda Messenger, scheduled for top billing, evidently had far less trivial things to do with her time than turn up at Loft-

us Road. Instead we were treated to the Beverley Sisters (one of whom is the widow of Billy Wright of Wolves and England fame), who admitted that what they knew about football could be written on the back of a postage stamp. No wonder they were all clutching copies of the game.

Not that this version of Trivial Pursuit calls for an extensive football knowledge; this is no board game *Question of Sport*, not with questions like: What was the name of Bobby Moore's cat? (Pele); What colour are Roberto Baggio's eyes? (green); Which player did Vinnie Jones claim he'd beat by tying his dreadlocks to the corner flag? (Rund Gullit).

Jones, in fact, is featured in at least six of the questions, which fall into six categories: the world of football, players and personalities, history of the game, road to the Cup, off the pitch and free-kick. He admits that the game is a favourite of the Wimbledon players on away trips, and that "Chris Perry always wins, although Joe [Kinnear] gets all the old questions right".

Strangely, the man who spent 12 months devising the questions has absolutely no interest in football, although he did once go and watch Hall-

fax Town. Brian Highley claims he's tried to "make the game lively and appealing to everyone, not just hardcore football fans", and it certainly reads a nice line between the weighty and the rather banal.

The PR blurb, in fact, describes it as "the ultimate non-anorak football product which will provide a timely and entertaining foil to the serious business of *France 98* and unite lovers and loathers of the game in happy contemplation of the national sport". Thankfully, the questions are not so worry and, since they do not all focus on the World Cup, the game won't become obsolete as soon as the final whistle blows in the Stade de France on 12 July. Consequently it could well enjoy a longevity in the marketplace of Peter Shilton-like proportions.

Its nearest competitor is bound to be the World Cup version of *Monopoly*, in which Brazil are *Ma-fair*, while poor old Scotland have drawn the short straw and are the Old Kent Road, which was always downmarket, cheap and distinctly undesirable. Still, as they say in real football, at the end of the day it's only a game.

We're (not) all going to Wembley

"We're on the march, with George's army. We're all going to Wembley!"

Five years ago the Arsenal fans were singing this song every week. Led by the seemingly infallible George Graham, the Gunners were closing in on two Wembley finals and an unprecedented domestic cup double. They damn well did it too.

Arsenal played four times at Wembley in the 1992-3 season, beating Spurs in the FA Cup semi-final and Sheffield Wednesday in both the FA and Coca-Cola Cup finals, the former in a replay. For a lad who had stared disbelievingly at the telly as the Gunners pulled off a miraculous 3-2 win over Manchester United in the FA Cup final of 1979, being present at Wembley to see the Gunners lift the trophy in '93 was a dream fulfilled.

Now comes the Wembley nightmare: Arsenal Football Club plan to leave Highbury and make Wembley their new home. Unthinkable? To the fans, perhaps, but not, apparently, to the club's directors, who are attempting to buy the national stadium.

Arsenal's need for a stadium with a minimum capacity of 50,000 has been well documented, but until this week the majority of supporters be-

lieved that the club would eventually resolve its differences with Islington Borough Council and find a way to redevelop Highbury.

On Thursday, Arsenal confirmed that a bid for Wembley Stadium had been made. It is the worst news that Arsenal fans have heard since George Graham was sacked in February 1995.

The club insist that they wish to remain at Highbury. Fans are left wondering why plans to rebuild Highbury

still mourning the loss of the old North Bank terrace, impressive as the new North Bank Stand is. To leave Highbury altogether would break many fans' hearts.

Wembley is the most famous football stadium in Britain, but would it ever feel like Arsenal's home, or would Arsenal fans feel the same disillusionment as the Wimbledon fans forced to watch their team's "home" fixtures as tenants at Selhurst Park?

The atmosphere at a Wembley cup final is something to savour, and it is conceivable that Arsenal could fill the stadium for Premiership games against the likes of Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea. However, for a midweek game against Southampton, Wembley would be half full at best and, as certain England friendlies have proven, a half-empty Wembley is a soulless place.

Arsenal fans want their club to compete with Europe's best. But leaving Highbury for Wembley will not only leave Islington poorer both culturally and economically; it will also test the loyalty of the Arsenal's most devoted fans.

Ultimately, it is not the prospect of a move to Wembley that fills the supporters with dread. It is losing Highbury, a place that Arsenal fans call The Home Of Football.

FAN'S EYE VIEW

NO 245
Highbury
BY
PAUL
ELLIOTT

have been blocked, and whether relocating to Wembley is really the best option open to the club.

Highbury has been Arsenal's home since 1913. There is so much history about the place; the elegant East and West Stands, both listed buildings; the famous marble halls; the bust of the great Herbert Chapman. This grand old stadium is a big part of what makes Arsenal a great club.

Football fans love tradition. Many Arsenal fans are



SPORT

Saturday 14 March 1998

Fifth Test: Thorpe joins Middlesex batsman as England centurion as defiant sixth-wicket partnership keeps toiling West Indies at bay

Ramprakash's joy at first Test century

Cricket
By Derek Pringle
in Bridgetown

England 376-6
v West Indies

IT IS NOT often that a major innings serves both England's long and short-term hopes, but Mark Ramprakash's maiden Test century here yesterday would have come closer than most to achieving it. Walking to the crease when his team were 53 for 4, Ramprakash, aided by Graham Thorpe's hundred at the other end, saw England into competitive territory, breaking the highest-ever sixth wicket partnership for England against the West Indies set on this ground in 1974.

For onlookers, this was Test cricket from the golden eras when batsmen reigned supreme on feathered pitches and scores over 400 were the only currency worth dealing in. In the process England's chances of levelling the series were transformed from hopeless to hopeful.

For Ramprakash, though, it was joy unconfined, the personal epiphany coming at 11.40am, when after slow progress, he struck Nixon McLean for a glorious four through extra cover off the back foot. The scorers indicated it had taken him a mind-sapping 379 minutes. In truth it had taken him 38 innings and innumerable sleepless nights to finally turn his boyhood dreams with reality.

The blooding of Ramprakash has been a long and tortuous journey, and many less passionate men would have long thrown in the towel. Interestingly, anthropologists might observe that it is a route that appears to be favoured exclusively by Middlesex captains, and Ramprakash's predecessor, Mike Gatting, who ended with a decent enough Test record, took 58 innings to reach the same milestone.

Mind you, Gatting's fellow selector Graham Gooch only became a truly world-class player after his 36th birthday, an age Ramprakash at 28, predates by some eight years, and many

will be hoping that his knock here will now open the floodgates.

In many ways, Ramprakash was perhaps fortunate that John Crawley had played in Trinidad. But although the pitch in Georgetown, where he scored a brilliant 63, was poor, the ones in Port of Spain were confidence-sapping green-tops that have caused bad habits to creep in to the games of both Mike Atherton and Nasser Hussain.

However, what is most surprising about the last three innings the Middlesex captain has played, is the presence he appears to command at the crease. It is a bearing that only the really great batsmen tend to have and one that totally belies his modest record, almost as if, like Rip van Winkle, he had been away for some time only to return fully matured.

But while some claim to be able to put their finger on the reasons for the transformation others close to him still reckon it is the same old, highly strung Ramprakash, the intensity better focused not by any newly-found maturity, but by the constant kicks in the teeth experienced at Test level.

Whatever the reasons, Ramprakash was determined to enjoy his long-awaited success. He has spent a long time peering down the dark, narrow lanes. Now was the time for the helicopter view and raising his arms aloft to the cacophony, he drank in the tumultuous applause, pausing only to shake hands with Brian Lara, the opposing captain, and to accept a hug from Thorpe.

Poor Thorpe. It is the second time in a year that his own century has been swallowed up by events at the other end, the previous occasion being when he partnered Hussain during the



Walk over, weight lifted: Mark Ramprakash celebrates his maiden Test century at Bridgetown yesterday

Photograph: David Ashdown

Bridgetown scoreboard

West Indies won toss	
England - First innings	
(Overnight: 229 for 9)	
M A Atherton c Ambrose b Walsh	11
A J Stewart c D Williams b Walsh	12
M A Butler c Hooper b Ambrose	19
N Hussain c Lara b Hooper	5
G P Thorpe c Lara b Hooper	103
M R Ramprakash not out	103
R C Russell c Lambert b Hooper	32
D W Hoadley not out	1
Total (for 6, 129 overs)	
Fall: 1-25 (Stewart), 2-34 (Atherton), 3-53 (Hussain), 4-53 (Butler), 5-51 (Russell), 6-58 (Thorpe)	
To bat: A R Caddick, A R C Fraser, P C R Tufnell	
Progress: First day: 305, 84 min, 20 overs; Lunch: 55-4 (Thorpe 5, Ramprakash 2) 28 overs; Thorpe retired hurt at lunch with back spasms and returned at the fall of the fifth wicket, 100; 57 min, 43.3 overs; Test: 148-4 (Ramprakash 45, Thorpe 10) 56 overs, 150; 244 min, 57.3 overs; 200: 330 min, 76.2 overs; New ball taken after 91 overs at 228-5	
WEST INDIES: C B Lara b, P A Wallace, *B G Lara, S Chandrasekhar, C L Hooper, R C Holder, D Williams, I R Bell, G E L Anderson, N A M McLean, G A Walsh	
Umpires: C J Michay (SA) and E Nicholls (W)	

latter's brilliant double century against Australia at Edgbaston last June.

A player of few frills, Thorpe clearly has a growing reputation for shepherding tempestuous team-mates past significant milestones. But if the role implies something of the second fiddle about it, the left-hander was anything but as Ramprakash, hitting just three boundaries in the morning ses-

sion, took time weighing up the best route to the peak. His journey, although painstaking, was not without its nervous moments, as one wild slash over gully off McLean testified.

After lunch, and with both centuries in the bag, both increased their run-scoring rate as the bowlers, particularly the quicker ones, became tired and disconsolate.

Unable to resort to the

roughhouse tactics of their youth, Courtney Walsh had to resort to line and length instead. But while they are still fine bowlers, the lack of constant menace previously afforded them by youth, and more recently by the spicy pitches, made them little more than honest trundlers.

With a long hot day in the field slowly unrolling in front of them, it was left to Carl Hoop-

er to wheel away from one end and wait for the mistakes. Hooper is an underrated bowler and his slow drip tactics almost paid immediate dividends when Ramprakash skied a big hit just out Roland Holder's reach at mid-wicket.

But if the disappointment of a near chance was proving difficult for the West Indies to swallow, Thorpe made it easier when he edged the off-spinner to slip.

Having batted so well, especially after suffering back spasms the previous day, it was the kind of nothing dismissal Thorpe seems to specialise in against spin.

For someone who can look as solid as Gibraltar against the quick bowlers, Thorpe has a habit of getting out to unthreatening deliveries from the slow men and his angled bat guided the ball into Lara's hands.

Henry Blofeld, page 19

TODAY

11 PAGES OF SPORT
BEGIN
ON PAGE 14

ON MONDAY

THE MAN WHO WOULD
BE KING
PETR KORDA TALKS TO
JOHN ROBERTS

Ferguson expecting his big names to rise to big game

Football

By Guy Hodgson

FIVE weeks ago Alex Ferguson was asked whether he would prefer a draw when Arsenal met Chelsea at Highbury the following day. "No, I'd like an Arsenal win," he replied, leaving no doubts as to where he anticipated the greater challenge to come from.

The Manchester United manager was granted his wish but, as the landscape at the top of the Premiership has changed, so has the threat and he might regret it now. Arsenal beat Chelsea on 8 February and launched a charge which has taken them to within nine points of the champions with three games in hand.

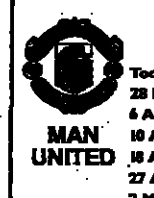
A win at Old Trafford today and the one-horse title race that bookies had lost interest in will suddenly contain a stable of contenders. But if United win every one else will look to second place as the limit of their ambition and turf accountant's books shut all over Britain. Today's match is that important.

Ferguson, who is known to like a bet, concurs with that assessment and will be hoping his team revert to one character trait rather than indulge their inclination to, in his own words, "make things hard for ourselves".

"I think we're recognised as big game players and I confidently expect my team to be up for this one," he said yesterday. "They always are on these occasions. This is a big, big game, and if we win it I think it will just about clinch the title for us.

Race for the Premiership

	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	GD
Man Utd	30	11	2	1	35	6	7	4	5	23	16	60	+36
Arsenal	27	10	2	2	29	9	4	7	2	17	17	51	+20



Remaining fixtures

Today Arsenal (H)	Today Man Utd (A)
28 Mar Wimbledon (H)	28 Mar Sheffield Wed (A)
4 Apr Blackburn (A)	31 Mar Bolton (A)
10 Apr Liverpool (H)	4 Apr Liverpool (A)
18 Apr Newcastle (H)	11 Apr Newcastle (H)
27 Apr Chelsea (A)	18 Apr Blackburn (A)
2 May Leeds (H)	18 Apr Wimbledon (H)
10 May Barnsley (A)	25 Apr Barnsley (A)
	10 May Villa (A)

We've only seven matches to go after this one and games are running out for our rivals. Of course, if Arsenal get a result it'll mean we're in for a cliff hanger.

"In fairness to us, we've performed in all the big games this season. We won at Liverpool, Chelsea and Newcastle and beat Blackburn at Old Trafford and even though we lost at Highbury in November we were denied a blatant penalty that day."

The match at Highbury has little bearing on today's match in the same way that the nuances of play had scant relevance to the changing scoreline in November. United began magnificently, Teddy Shering-

ham directing the traffic, and yet went 2-0 down. In the end Arsenal thoroughly deserved their 3-2 win, as Ferguson acknowledged, but both teams might have prevailed.

The main lesson learned could be that Arsenal can afford to surrender the midfield for long periods and still prosper, as they did against Wimbledon at Selhurst Park on Wednesday. "The way we played there is exactly what we'll need at Old Trafford," their manager, Arsène Wenger, said, "a mixture of high skill and typical Arsenal character."

Wenger has also said that a draw might prove to be a good result so the Gunners are un-

likely to be going out with all barrels blazing, and any preference for the counter-attack will be aided by the absence of Nicky Butt, who tends to tidy things up in midfield.

The most influential absence, greater even than Ian Wright's, could prove to be Ryan Giggs. Without the Welsh winger opponents have been able to channel United towards the middle where big centre-backs have picked off long balls to Teddy Sheringham and Andy Cole.

David Beckham might be the best crosser in the Premiership but he rarely gets outside his full-back on the right flank and with no real threat on the flanks there has been a predictability about their play in recent times.

In their last eight games they have scored only seven times and gained only 11 points. Arsenal have been predictable, too, but only in the number of games they have been winning recently.

"We have found our consistency again now and the spirit and quality in the side is as strong as ever," Wenger said. "We have had very many problems with injuries and suspensions but we have shown we can overcome them. For me, even quality is not enough unless you have spirit. And, above all, consistency is the main thing at the top level."

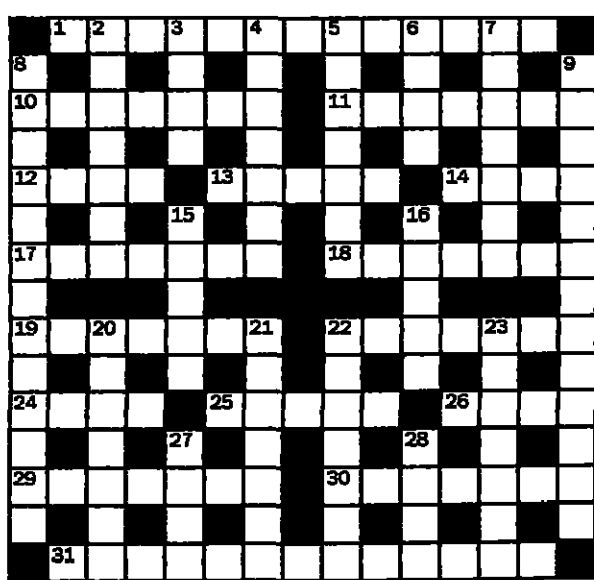
"There is a bit more pressure on United, but not enough yet. Two or three weeks ago the title was just a dream for us people laughed when I said we could do it."

No one will be laughing when they win at Old Trafford. Least of all Ferguson.

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3558, Saturday 14 March

By Spurling



Friday's solution

Last Saturday's solution

FRIDAY'S SOLUTION
DOWN
1. No source of fresh linen? (13)
10. Musician showing a rare bit of pluck in his time? (7)
11. Constituent of course requires 'lory' to accept defeat (7)
12. People's event (4)
13. Smart footwear by the Brazilians (5)
14. Section of choir tried backing small group (4)
17. Full power nearly restored (7)
18. Dignity shown by model RA seduced (7)
19. Tablet - take one when you have a turn outside (7)
22. Reference book omitting a line in the speech (7)
24. Penetrated by Odysseus' first attempt? It was (4)
25. National Westminster security guards (5)
26. Record is held by plainclothes policeman (4)
29. Little change for Lisbon business filing short final VAT return (7)
30. Attack on music piracy? (3-4)
31. Costs of getting ready to travel? (8,5)

ACROSS
2. Old craft for centuries associated with source of wisdom (7)
3. Bit of ironmongery visible through chipped varnish? (4)
4. Calculator they use for working out spans (7)
5. Black horse overtaking taxi (7)
6. Retreat that's by no means satisfactory (4)
7. Went inside camouflaged tree-den (7)
8. Dishonesty in piano exercises unnatural? (5,8)
9. Funny man in comic duo's impossible to contact (13)
10. Cloth employed in the army (5)
16. Skill required to climb on top of church? Not very much (5)
20. Late riser? (7)
21. Heavenly apparition turning women on? (3,4)
22. Decline to accept Norwegian, say, is cause of ill-feeling (7)
23. Copy one article found in middle of Germany (7)
27. Army corps has to cover hot spots (4)
28. It's in the Square, actually (4)

The first five correct solutions to this week's puzzle opened next Thursday receive hand-drawn copies of the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations. Answers and winners' names will be published next Saturday. Send solutions to Saturday Crossword, E.O. Box 4918, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5UL. Please use the box number and postcode and give your own postcode. Last week's winners: C Mather, Warrington; P Robinson, Bracknell; N Flannan, Ipswich; T Holwell, Harrogate; B Martin, Carracas.

سورة من الامم



YOUR MONEY

Personal finance and property

Saturday 14 March 1998

New pension plans in a tangle

Plans to simplify pensions by using kitemarks could be brought down by Brussels. By Mark Colgate

The Government's drive to give low-cost private pensions to more than 8 million workers who only have state pensions is in jeopardy because of European laws.

A key reform, under which the Government has planned to slash the cost of regulation by putting "kitemarks" on cheap pensions, would put an entire swathe of pension providers outside the law.

Life insurers, which provide nearly a third of all private pensions to date, this week warned they could not sell "stakeholder pensions", a central plank of the Government's welfare reforms, if they were kitemarked.

The European Union's "Third Life directive" makes it illegal for insurance companies to offer products that are pre-approved by the Government, or kitemarked, because it would supposedly kill off competition. According to the insurers, the law could also block the Government from cutting the cost of regulating Individual Savings Accounts by using a kitemark.

This means a widely touted method of reducing the cost of long-term savings products, backed by the Association of British Insurers and investment houses such as M&G, is in effect no longer an option for the Government.

As the Government looks to expand the availability of investment products to the less well paid, one of its primary concerns has been to keep costs to an absolute minimum.

Kitemarking would be one means of doing so because it cut out large costs to the consumer. The idea was that the Government would authorise certain products as approved for sale to anyone. This would eliminate much of the cost of sales regulation as well as reducing the cost of financial advice.

In its submission to the Government on pensions reform, Standard Life says the overall costs of creating, selling and advising on a pension worked out at 18 per cent of all the money put in. Of this, 8.5 per cent consisted of the cost of advice, be it through a financial adviser or direct sales force.

Ironically, the relevant elements in Europe's Third Life directive, which make it illegal for insurance products to be

kitemarked, were introduced by the British in an attempt to open up the German market to external competition.

But not all sellers of pensions and investment products will be affected. Unit trusts are not subject to the European life directives and so could slot in to any kitemarking or pre-approval regime for either ISAs or pensions.

Virgin Direct, which has been a keen advocate of kitemarking for stakeholder pensions, has its own pension set up through unit trusts, not through a life company.

Martin Campbell, product development manager at Virgin Direct, says: "We understand there would be a number of problems with the Third Life directive and we hope there is

a way round this. We would certainly not want only a small segment of the market to be eligible for kitemarking."

Virgin says it wants a kitemark to be awarded to clear, transparent and flexible products to help attract the 6 million people who currently do not save.

Mr Campbell said: "We would like to have kitemarking extended to all financial products. This would not tell the customers the product is the best for them but it would mean they would avoid all sorts of hidden nasties."

The unit trust industry's own trade body has come down against the need for kitemarks.

Philip Warland, director of Autif, said, "The first problem with kitemarking is moral

hazard. People could see it as a recommendation to purchase and if that happens and the product does not work in some sense, the Government will eventually foot the bill.

"Secondly, if some products are kitemarked what does this say about products which are not, even if some of them would be more suitable for some individuals than the kitemarked version? Finally there is a difference between cost and value, not all low-cost products offer good value.

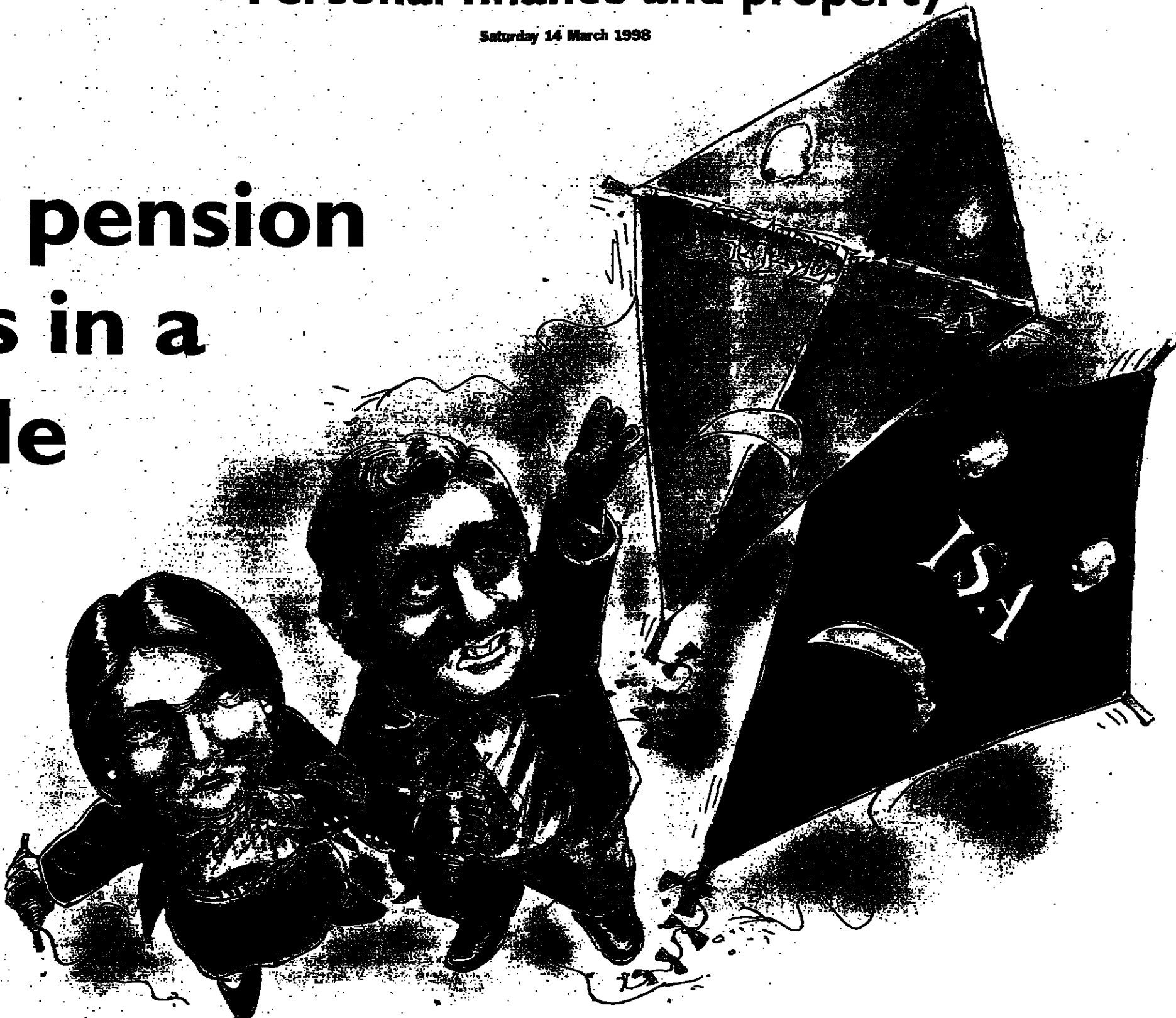
"I imagine the Government is seeking a product that is accessible, safe, flexible and has clear charging structures and above all is one that is recognised and authorised by a regulator. This is exactly what a unit trust is."

However, the unit trust industry faces its own problem down the line with pensions. There is a move among investment groups to convert unit trusts into a more recent investment vehicle, the open-ended investment company or Oeic. As yet there is no legislation in place to allow Oeics to be used as pensions vehicles.

The insurance industry is fighting back by trying to find a formula which is as close as possible to kitemarking without having to resort to pre-approval of life products.

So far, the Third Life directive has not had a big impact because no one on the Continent has complained about pre-approval in the UK. Paul Grace, who heads the

Association of British Insurers' tax committee, said: "The UK Government said three years ago it was looking to remove pre-certification on qualifying policies issued by life assurance companies. While it is still a requirement of UK law it is outlawed by European law. If there were any objections on the Continent, the UK government would have to move swiftly."



INDEX

Superwoman and Virgin

Nicola Horlick, the City fund manager known as superwoman because of her five children and seven-figure earnings, has been bet £6,000 that she cannot beat a fund with no manager. Virgin Direct challenged her to beat the FT-SE Actuaries All-Share Index, which is tracked by Virgin's fund and charges half as much as the growth fund she runs for SocGen, her new employer.

Rush for tax freedom

As Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, puts the finishing touches to Tuesday's Budget, investors are rushing to seize their tax-free allowances for the 1997/98 tax year. Our writers explore how the rich are getting away from the taxman - and how the average investor can try to do the same.

Pages 6-10

Bargain home loans

The Mortgage Operation, Coventry Building Society and Bradford & Bingley have all launched bargain mortgages this week, with some rates fixed for five years at 6.2 per cent. Some are even lower. But surely there must be a catch! Page 5

Ultra-cheap pension

Eagle Star has slashed pension charges to a new low for customers who save substantial sums before the financial year ends on 5 April. Customers who arrange by telephone to save a lump sum of more than £20,000 will be charged just 0.5 per cent a year.

Decisions, decisions for Midshires carpetbaggers

City analysts are predicting a bidding war for Birmingham Midshires which could see its 1 million members offered windfalls approaching £1,000 each - more than 50 per cent in excess of what they expected.

Members of Birmingham Midshires Building Society are already facing the prospect of a £150 boost in their cash windfall after Halifax put in a bid for the society this week.

More than 1 million members were expecting an average windfall of about £600 through Royal Bank of Scotland's proposed takeover deal of up to £630m for Midshires. The exclusive deal was set up in August, seven months ago.

But after Halifax barged in unexpectedly with a higher offer of £780m, society members could now be eligible for that little bit of extra help, with an average windfall of about £750.

While the board of Birmingham Midshires is supposed to be bound to its RBS agreement, the City believes it cannot ignore the Halifax offer. If the board talks to Halifax, other bidders are expected to weigh in.

John Leonard, a top banking analyst at Salomon Smith Barney, says: "It's the open season for Birmingham Midshires. I expect Lloyds Bank and Autif to be among the bidders." What does this battle for the mean for members? Carpet-bagging Midshires - perhaps more

The bidding war for Birmingham Midshires must be good news for members, writes Sophie Tullis

than a quarter of all members - will be laughing all the way to the newly converted bank. More than 300,000 of them rushed to open new accounts during 1996 to 1997, on speculation that the society would convert.

Halifax claims its deal is better, because former members will be able to have access to its products and services as well as getting more money.

According to RBS, its deal is not just about money; it guarantees to run Midshires as an independent operation for three years after the takeover, protecting all the jobs and branches in the UK.

A group of rebel members, called Save our Building Societies, who are campaigning to prevent the Midshires

from becoming a bank, think the takeover could help its campaign.

Campaign co-ordinator and member Bob Goodall says: "We wouldn't say the deals were better either way. We will reflect the view of the members who are contacting us. Some will go for the money, but we just want to keep the society going."

"Whether Royal Bank of Scotland or Halifax takes it over, mortgages will become more expensive and savings less attractive."

The campaign now has enough supporters - 122 members - to force a special meeting to discuss both bids and potentially block either of them.

Some doubt remains over whether Midshires' mortgage rates will go up

if it is taken over. Unlike other mutuals, it has never tried to compete on price.

Birmingham Midshires has a standard variable rate for mortgages of 8.7 per cent, which is the same as Halifax's rate.

Royal Bank of Scotland's standard variable rate for mortgages is also 8.7 per cent, but seven out of 10 of its borrowers take out its flexible mortgage, which is more competitive, at 7.95 per cent.

Members who like the smell of money and want to get as big a windfall as possible will probably want to be able to vote for the Halifax deal.

Those who want to make sure their local Birmingham Midshires branch is still down the road will probably prefer to vote for the Royal Bank of Scotland deal.

The Birmingham Midshires' board of directors, which has a duty to look after the long-term interests of its members, has yet to give a clear steer on which deal it will recommend.

Midshires chief executive Mike Jackson says: "There are a myriad of things to consider [on behalf of members]. The RBS offer is a great deal in the round; on service, price, looking after our people who are responsible for that service, and making sure there are branches in the communities."

"There are thousands of decisions

and thought processes to go through. We will not be rushed into making a decision on the hoof."

He adds: "Until we have evaluated Halifax's proposal, it is not possible to say what that deal is like."

Jackson, whose home phone number is available to all at the society, plays down any potential rebellion from members. He says he has had eight calls in seven days from members, six of which were about the deal. One wanted to stay mutual, one wanted a higher price and the others wanted clarification, although they were happy about the society converting.

Jackson and other directors may be answering calls, but their service does not extend to a written response, according to Sobe, which claims that many members who have written to directors have still to receive replies.

The Midshires board is in a tricky position. It has an obligation to the members to consider the Halifax deal. But it is understood that Midshires is already obliged to put the RBS deal to members, although it does not have to recommend it.

The Birmingham Midshires directors will have to make their views clear in the transfer document which is due to go out next month. The vote on the RBS offer is scheduled for June. But whatever the directors recommend, it will be the members who decide.

Average windfall payouts for ex-building societies which converted to banks last year			
converters	average payout to qualifying members	conversion date	
Halifax	£2,400.00	2 June 1997	
Alliance & Leicester	£1,944.25	21 April 1997	
Woolwich	£1,648.00	7 July 1997	
Northern Rock	£2,280.00	1 Oct 1997	

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VERITY

The nasty legacy of endowments

This week the full cost of the biggest financial scandal in this country's history, the mis-selling of personal pensions, was finally given an official price tag: £11bn. Both regulators and Government are now steady in their resolve to clean up the mess: there will be compensation.

Unfortunately, the regulators are much less strident about another nasty legacy of the late 1980s and early 1990s: the mis-selling of endowments. Evidence is piling up that hundreds of thousands of endowment holders have been led to expect much more from the policies than they will actually get.

The Institute & Faculty of Actuaries is a powerful body representing the professionals who have the job of sharing out life insurers' investment funds. This week it warned that endowments would pay out much less in the coming years than they have done.

Those who bought an endowment in 1973 are laughing. Payouts this year have reached record levels. A saver who put in £50 a month (totalling £15,000 savings), would see a payout close to £100,000. Before tax, they have got a return worth roughly 16 per cent a year.

The future looks less rosy. Long-term interest rates have hit a nadir of 6 per cent and inflation is widely expected to stay low. Investment returns are expected to be closer to 10 than 16 per cent. That leads actuaries to anticipate a 5 per cent fall in payouts – every year. By 2006, the same 25-year policy is likely to pay just over £50,000.

For some of those with an endowment mortgage, this is unpleasant news.

If you were led to believe your endowment would grow modestly – at, say, 7 per cent a year – then there is unlikely to be a problem. But some sales people were less scrupulous. Keen to sell an endowment (loadsamoney), rather than a repayment (no commission), they referred people to the double-digit returns of the 1970s and 1980s. "You can pay off the mortgage AND get a lump sum at the end," they typically said. An honest sales person would have added – "but only in the unlikely event that these dazzling returns keep up".

By assuming that policies would grow quickly, financial advisers could offer cheaper premiums to the unwitting homebuyer. But the cheaper the premiums, the riskier the policy.

A substantial minority of endowment holders – possibly over a million people – now face the danger that their endowments will not pay off their mortgages. Those most in danger are those who bought policies between 1982 and 1987, when sales people assumed high investment growth.

Scammy mortgages didn't stop with the 1980s. As our piece on page 5 shows, homebuyers are still being offered apparently cheap mortgages which sometimes have nasty catches in the small print.

What are the regulators doing about this? Nothing – there aren't any regulators. Helen Liddell, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, is still unimpressed about whether the new Financial Services Authority should regulate mortgages. Of course it should, and quickly please.

Add some PEPs to future plans

THE MAKEOVER

Name: Phil and Jane Dunn
Occupation: Advertising make-up manager and occupational therapist.

The problem: How to find the most tax-efficient way of making the most of savings and providing for their daughter – who was excluded from receiving windfall shares because of her age.

The advice: By making the most of tax-free allowances in PEPs before they disappear next year, the Duns can maximise the opportunity to make their money grow.



Thinking about long-term investments: Phil and Jane Dunn with daughter Rebecca

Photograph: Andrew Buurman

Having a young daughter just two years and 10 months old has made Phil Dunn and his wife, Jane, think long and hard about their future financial planning.

Phil, 44, who works as an advertising make-up manager, has so far been wary about putting money into personal equity plans (PEPs) because of the longer-term commitment which this type of investment requires. However, now that Phil enjoys a greater feeling of job security, he would like to consider this tax-efficient means of saving since clearly, as a borderline higher-rate taxpayer, earning £30,000 a year, any tax saving is important.

The Adviser: Graham Bates, of the leading independent financial adviser Bates & Partners, based in Leeds. Telephone: 0113 295 5955.

The Advice: There are two channels available to Phil as far as PEPs are concerned. The first is to choose the regular savings route, which would allow as little as £20 per month to be squirrelled away from any surplus monthly income. Alternatively, Phil could choose to invest a lump sum. But he will need to act quickly if he wants to

make use of his general PEP allowance for the current tax year, which ends on 5 April. PEPs are in their closing stages, with no further investment expected to be allowed after 5 April 1999, so Phil would be wise to make the most of any allowances before they disappear.

One option would be to use some of the capital, which is presently sitting on deposit. Phil has a balance of around £6,000 held in a savings account with the Clydesdale Bank earning 5.2 per cent net. Although this is a fair rate for a short-term investment, there is the potential for a significantly higher return proving Phil can invest for five years or longer and is willing to accept a medium-risk strategy, which he says he is happy to do. Since maximising long-term capital growth is his primary objective, he would be sensible to consider investment vehicles such as PEPs, which can provide this potential.

Marks & Spencer unit trust
Jane, who works as a Probation Officer, has already dipped her toe into stock market waters by taking out a PEP which invests in a Marks and Spencer unit trust.

The plan has a current value in the region of £7,500 and Jane has already earmarked this investment for the future – to help towards the cost of her daughter's school fees. One of the benefits which PEPs offer is the flexibility to access the money as required and of course, the proceeds can be used for any purpose.

Tessa roll-over

The Duns have both made use of Tessa. Phil has an account with the Abbey National to which he has contributed all but the final £600. Jane's first Tessa has already matured and she has opted for a second "roll-over" account, taken out through the Melton Mowbray Building Society.

By choosing to roll-over the £9,000 capital, Jane keeps her money in a tax-free environment for a further five years, even though new Tessa investments will no longer be allowed following the introduction of the new Individual Savings Account on 5 April 1999.

Phil, however, would be wise to consider a variety of options before he opts for a second Tessa, since other types of investment might prove to be

more fruitful in his quest for capital growth, particularly if he is willing to accept a balanced approach to risk.

The Woolwich account

The future of their young daughter is clearly a priority and Phil has already established a savings account with Woolwich for her benefit. Each month, Phil pays £20 into the account plus whatever is in his daughter's money box, usually bringing the total to around £30. According to Phil, the return is miserly but his biggest gripe with Woolwich is that, being a minor, his daughter did not qualify for windfall shares when the society converted last year to a bank. Understandably, therefore, Phil has very little loyalty to the Woolwich and wants to know what he should do with these funds (about £1,500 to date) to give his daughter the best start in life.

Given the benefit of the long-term investment horizon, which is possible because his daughter is still so young, the sensible approach would be to invest the capital in an environment which offers the potential for substantial long-term capital appreciation. A deposit account is definitely not

the right home for these savings. Phil should consider using one or more unit trust funds and he would be wise to seek the advice of an independent adviser. Many unit trust savings plans will also accept on-going monthly contributions and this is an excellent way to save because you get the benefit of the "smoothing out effect" on unit prices.

The pension

Another consideration for Phil is his pension. As a member of his employer's scheme, he contributes £100 each month but admits that he has not changed the level of contributions in the last nine years. At 44, he should address the question of maximising pension with his adviser at the earliest opportunity.

Fortunately, Phil and Jane have a small mortgage of just £26,000 against their home, which is valued at £125,000. Last year the mortgage proved to be a benefit when Phil received 200 windfall shares as a result of Halifax's flotation. Wisely, he has chugged on to the shares, which have so far proved to be an excellent investment. Who knows what they might be worth when his daughter comes of age!

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ROBIN AMLÖT
INTERNET
INVESTOR

Of cookie monsters and search engines

First Direct, Britain's first and biggest "direct" banking business plans to offer PC Banking free of charge to its customers. This is not an internet-based service but an intranet, on the bank's own secure private network. It has been on free trial to 5,000 customers since June last year. First Direct says it may offer the service over the internet in the future, depending on customer demand. I had planned to review the service in some detail - there is apparently a demonstration of its service on the bank's website.

The reason why I haven't looked at the website is because it will not let me. Well, that's not quite true. It will not let me without sending a "cookie". Normally, I avoid techno-jargon but this is one piece of it of which anybody using the web needs to be aware.

The best analogy for a cookie is Caller ID on telephones. Caller ID lets the person you are calling know your telephone number. Cookies work in much the same way. A website knows who has logged on by looking at your cookie. Anything you tell a website that uses cookies, it will remember the next time you visit. Anything you do at a website that uses cookies it can also remember, tracking a behaviour pattern - allowing the business behind the site to tailor its products to you and target you with special mailshots.

Cookies, so the argument goes, smooth the path of consumerism, making sure you only get business offers that interest you. They have also sparked a serious debate about privacy issues.

Anyway, FirstDirect will not let you access its website without sending a cookie. Which raises two questions. First, is it polite for a website to do this? No, it is not. (Imagine being escorted out of your local supermarket by a bouncer because you refused to tell them your address.) Second, is it safe to accept the

cookie? That depends on how much you value your privacy.

The bottom line is I didn't feel like accepting First Direct's cookie. So I did not get to view the website. Many commercial websites now have cookies. However, most tend not to refuse you access if you refuse the cookies.

Another piece of web jargon you may come across is "search engine". Search engines are the internet's telephone directories, basically automated programmes which seek out and note the addresses of other websites which match specified criteria.

This month a new engine, FinanceWise, made its debut on the web. Set up by Risk Publications and IBM's Securities and Capital Markets Division, it is a free web search engine for banking and finance professionals. But it is also going to be a handy tool for individual investors.

By indexing only sites and pages relevant to the world of banking and finance, FinanceWise bypasses the millions of megabytes of irrelevant data returned with mainstream search engines. In fact, it is the only engine to offer three types of search option. You may search by keyword; by specific classes of products, suppliers, information or companies; or by sector listings.

FinanceWise is the first search engine to focus specifically on financial websites. However, directories (which tend not to be automated) of financial websites have been available for some time, including the UK Personal Finance Directory on Moneyworld and the Financial Information Net Directory (FINI).

First Direct: www.firstdirect.co.uk
FinanceWise: www.financewise.co.uk
UK Personal Finance Directory: www.moneyworld.co.uk
FINI: www.fini.co.uk

Nouveau riches for year 2000

Collect to invest: Art Nouveau is the ideal look for the new millennium, argues John Windsor

The millennium will have an Art Nouveau look. The year 2000 coincides with the centenary of the Paris Exposition Universelle that established Art Nouveau as a major force in art and design. Already, curators

investors - Americans, Greeks, Swiss, French, Italians - have cautiously entered the bidding, pushing prices up to mid-eighties, pre-crash levels.

The \$470,000 (about £287,000), bid at Sotheby's New York last

December for an enchanting Gallé wisteria table lamp, made in the magic year 1900, is an "immensely gratifying result", according to Philippe Garner of Sotheby's London. It may not be a patch on the crazy world-record for a wisteria lamp - 4,995,000 French francs (about £500,000) - paid for a less exquisite 1900 specimen at Sotheby's Monte Carlo in October 1990, just before the crash. But it shows that collectors are bidding confidently without taking leave of their senses.

Vendors, no longer fearful their Art Nouveau glass will be left on the block, are consigning more of it to auction. At Mr Garner's auction on Friday 20 March there are 41 pieces - mainly vases and table lamps - by the Frenchman Gallé, 39 by his one-time co-worker Daum, and five by the American Tiffany. Mr Garner has raised the minimum lot value to an up-market £1,500.

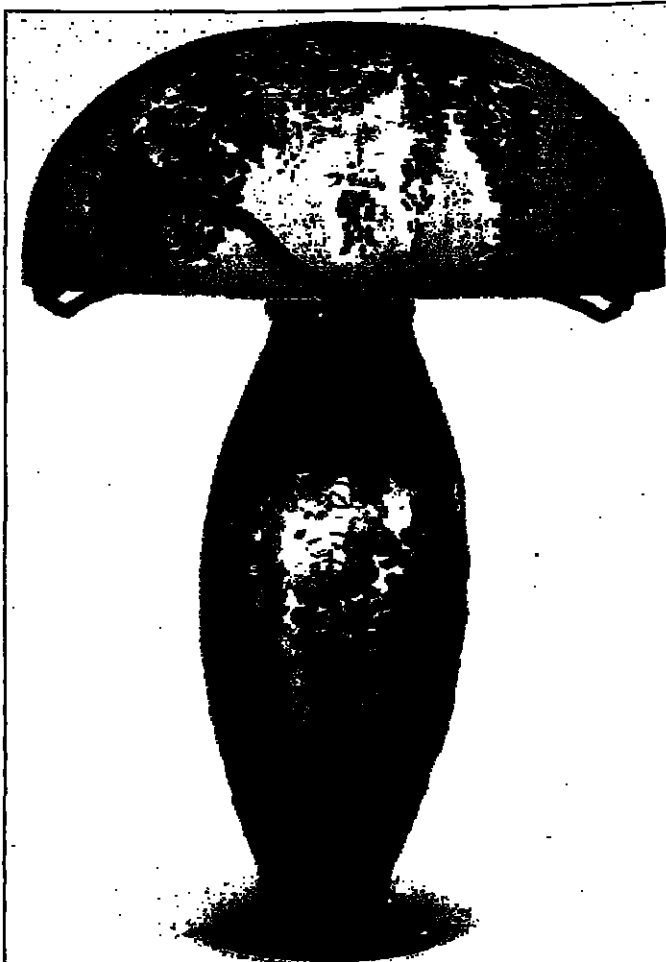
The forthcoming sale includes a 24-inch high Gallé wisteria table lamp, more than three inches taller than the one that fetched \$470,000 in December. It is estimated at what seems

to be a knock-down £35,000-£45,000. But it is not as fine. It is acid-etched but not hand-cut. The finest Gallé has several kaleidoscopic, multi-coloured layers of glass, some worked into the surface while still hot and then both etched and hand-carved, using a wheel like a dentist's drill.

The need to appreciate the phenomenal craftsmanship should - in an ideal world - deter crass speculators from bidding blindly for anything by a known Art Nouveau name. The price that will be paid for this month's wisteria lamp will, hopefully, indicate a discriminating market capable of restraint. A silly, high price, would raise fears of another boom-and-bust cycle.

For slimmer wallets, the sale has half a dozen Daum vases estimated in the £2,000-£6,000 range. It is also worth looking at glass designed by lesser names, such as the Austrian Loetz (estimated from £1,200), whose prices are rising on the coat-tails of the better-known Daum and Gallé.

Originally a fashionable, avant-garde style, Nouveau Art is still with us after well over a century. Its revival in the Sixties may have faded, but it refuses to go away. Mr Garner says: "It has earned its credentials as a mainstream subject - not in fashion, but not in danger of going out of fashion, either - and I don't see why it



Fragile but more portable than furniture: table lamp, left, and vase, below left, by Emile Gallé from the turn of the century

not just a style but a movement, with ideals that are cherished today more than ever. It stands for the synthesis of art and craft, for the humanisation of mass-production. And its florid abundance offers a dream of plenty to a population tired of arid minimalism and the dour philosophy of "small is beautiful". A minus point is that its decoration is sometimes "applied" in the worst sense - that is, as an excrescence.

Art Nouveau's runaway lines - the swirling hair of half-clad maidens draped with ribbons - make it heady, exotic, mysterious. When all the design history has been chewed over, it is perhaps this quality that gives it its deepest appeal. You might say that Nouveau Art is dead weird. But, these days, aren't we all?

Applied Arts from 1880: Friday, 20 March, (10.30am), Sotheby's, 34-35 New Bond Street, London W1 (0171-293 5000).

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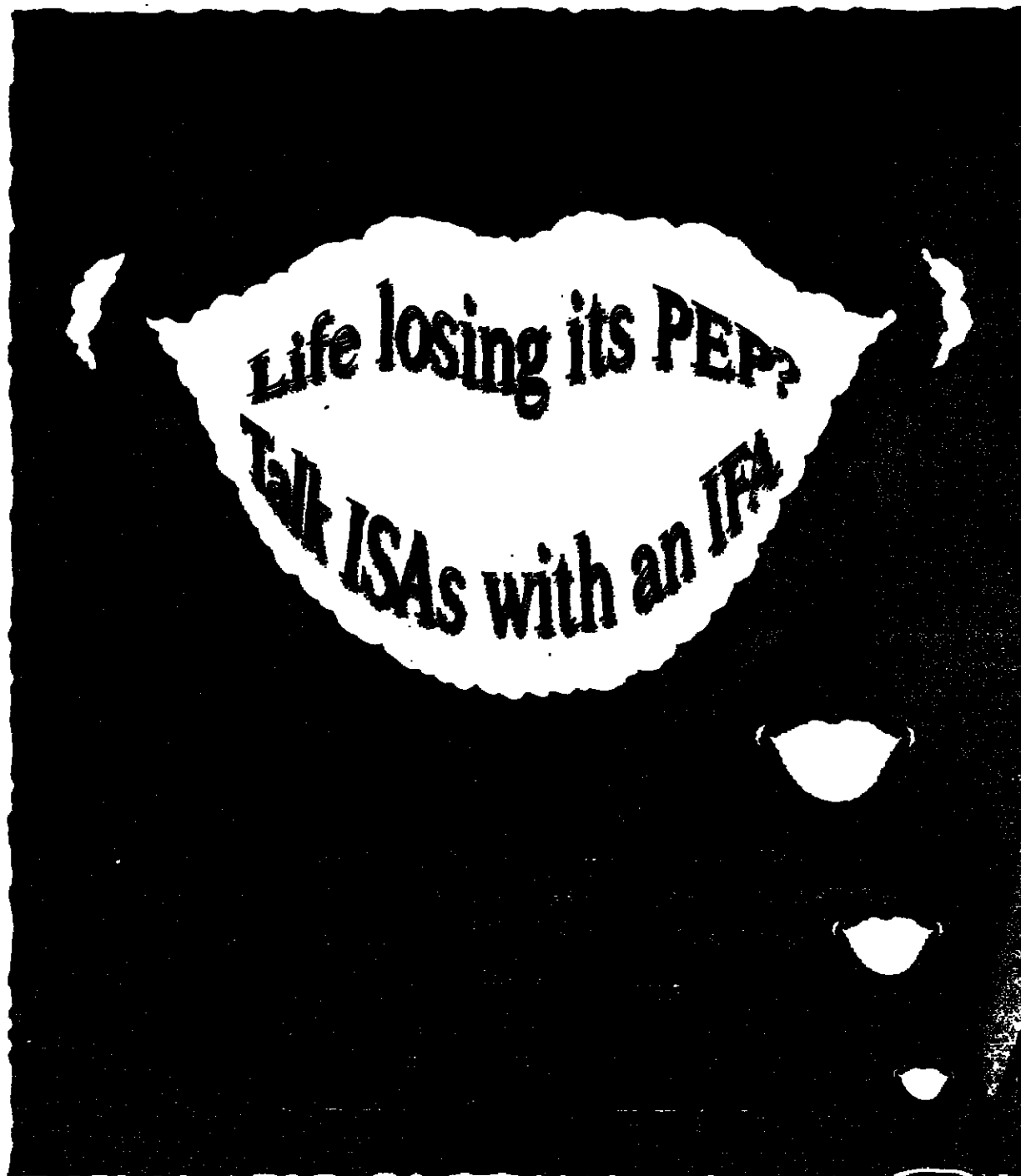
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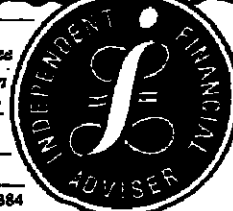
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PERSONAL LOAN RATES	
Direct Line Personal Loans	
Amount of Loan	APR
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£2,000	8.25%
£5,000	8.25%
£10,000	8.25%

All rates correct at 9th March 1998.

0181 667 1121
SAVINGS

0181 649 9099
MORTGAGES

0181 680 9966
PERSONAL LOANS

Source: Direct Line Financial Services. For further information about the Direct Line products listed above, please phone the appropriate number quoting ref. INDBB50

BEST BORROWING RATES

Telephone	% Rate and period	Min. amt	Fee	Comments
-----------	-------------------	----------	-----	----------

MORTGAGES

FIXED RATES

West Bromwich BS	0121 525 7070	5.55% to 30.0.00	75p	£200 cash rebate
First Mortgage	0800 800080	5.55% to 1.4.01	75p	£200
Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	5.25% to 1.4.00	50p	No MP for adv up to 65%

VARIABLE DISCOUNTED RATES

Scottham BS	0800 123148	0.50% for 1 year	80p	Up to £200 rebate*
First Mortgage	0800 800080	4.85% to 1.4.01	80p	£200
Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	6.00% to 1.4.01	75p	£200 rebate, rebate rate

FIRST TIME BUYERS FIXED RATES

Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	4.45% to 1.4.00	50p	No MP for adv up to 65%
First Mortgage	01002 300000	5.75% to 1.4.01	80p	£200
Scottham BS	0800 123148	6.14% for 5 years	80p	Up to £200 rebate*

FIRST TIME BUYERS VARIABLE DISCOUNTED RATES

Westchase	0845 757575	5.70% for 1 year	80p	2.5% of advance related
First Mortgage	0800 800080	5.55% to 1.4.01	80p	£200
Northern Rock	0800 123148	6.75% for 5 years	80p	Rebate of rate fee

UNSECURED PERSONAL LOANS

Telephone	APR %	Fixed monthly payments on £5K over 3 yrs	Min. amt	Comments
-----------	-------	--	----------	----------

UNSECURED

Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	9.9% H	£103.13	£168.11
Direct Line	0181 680 9099	12.0% A	£168.75	£168.38
First Direct	0800 121125	12.0%	£168.15	£168.38

SECURED LOANS (SECOND CHARGE)

Telephone	APR	Max. LTV	Advance	Term
-----------	-----	----------	---------	------

Clydesdale Bank	0800 240024	9.7%	£2K to £15K	5 years to 25 years
Royal Bank of Scotland	0800 121121	10.7%	£2.5K to £100K	3 years to 10 years
First Direct	0845 100103	11.2%	£2K to £15K	Up to 40 years

OVERDRAFTS

Telephone	Account	APR	Min. amt	Comments
-----------	---------	-----	----------	----------

Alliance & Leicester	0509 999555	9.7%	£500	£200 to £15K
Bank of Scotland Direct	0800 494604	11.0%	£100	£100 to £15K
Northern Rock	0800 121125	12.0%	£100	£100 to £15K

CREDIT CARDS

Telephone	Card Type	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Capital One Bank	0800 888000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
RBS Advance	0800 777770	Visa	0.54% H	£5.00	£50	56 days
Co-operative Bank	0800 100000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days

GOLD CARDS

Telephone	Card Type	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Capital One Bank	0800 888000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
Co-operative Bank	0800 100000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
RBS Advance	0800 777770	Visa	0.54% H	£5.00	£50	56 days

STORE CARDS

Telephone	Payment by direct debit	Payment by other methods	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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John Lewis	Visa	1.20%	18.0%	£1.00	£10	18.0%
Debenhams	Visa	1.20%	18.0%	£1.00	£10	18.0%
Marks & Spencer	Visa	1.20%	18.0%	£1.00	£10	18.0%

GUARANTEED INCOME BONDS (net)

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Capital One Bank	0800 888000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
Co-operative Bank	0800 100000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
RBS Advance	0800 777770	Visa	0.54% H	£5.00	£50	56 days

OFFSHORE ACCOUNTS (gross)

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
-----------	---------	------	-------	------------	----------	----------

Northern Rock Bank	01481 718121	Instant Premium	10.0%	£10.00	£10.00	Year
Northern Rock Bank	01481 718121	Instant Premium	10.0%	£10.00	£10.00	Year
Northern Rock Bank	01481 718121	Instant Premium	10.0%	£10.00	£10.00	Year

NATIONAL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (gross)

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
-----------	---------	------	-------	------------	----------	----------

Investment Accounts	1 Month	£20	4.75%	Year	£20	£20
Investment Accounts	2 Month	£20	4.75%	Year	£20	£20
Investment Accounts	3 Month	£20	4.75%	Year	£20	£20

INVESTMENT TRUSTS

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Capital One Bank	0800 888000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
Co-operative Bank	0800 100000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
RBS Advance	0800 777770	Visa	0.54% H	£5.00	£50	56 days

BEST SAVINGS RATES

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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INSTANT ACCESS

Clydesdale Bank	0800 445265	Savings	Instant	£1	0.75%	City
Street & Sefton BS	0845 413833	Branch Instant	Instant	£100	0.00%	Year
Northern Rock	0800 505000	Branch Instant	Instant	£100	0.00%	Year
Leeds & Holbeck BS	0800 225777	Branch Instant	Instant	£100	0.00%	Year

INSTANT ACCESS POSTAL ACCOUNTS

Standard Life Bank	0845 555557	Direct Access	Instant (1)	£1	0.90%	Year
Scottish Widows Bank	0845 845 0829	Direct Access	Instant (2)	£100	7.00%	Year
Savile	0800 855555	Direct Access	Instant (3)	£100	7.00%	Year
Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	Direct Access	Instant (4)	£100	7.00%	Year

NOTICE ACCOUNTS & BONDS

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Scottham BS	01723 300016	Academy 30	30 Day	£1,000	7.00%	Year
Leeds & Holbeck BS	0800 225777	Academy 30	30 Day	£1,000	7.00%	Year
Northern Rock	0800 505000	Academy 30	30 Day	£1,000	7.00%	Year

CHEQUE ACCOUNTS

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Investment Bank (UK)	0171 233 1850	HCA 5000	Instant	£5,000	0.45%	Month
Leeds & Holbeck BS	0800 225777	Classic Personal	Instant	£10,000	5.70%	Year
Leeds & Holbeck BS	0800 225777	Classic Personal	Instant	£10,000	5.70%	Year

FIXED RATE BONDS

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Norwich & Peterborough	01733 372222	Fixed Rate Bond	6 Month	£5,000	7.50% F	Yearly
Parsons BS	0800 807000	Fixed Rate Bond	1 Year	£500	7.50% F	Yearly
Shepherd BS	01509 503002	Fixed Rate Bond	10.3.98	£10,000	7.00% F	Yearly

FIRST TESSAS

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Norwich & Peterborough	01733 372222	First Tessa	5 Year	£100	8.00%	Year
Parsons BS	0800 807000	First Tessa	5 Year	£100	8.00%	Year
Shepherd BS	01509 503002	First Tessa	5 Year	£100	8.00%	Year

FOLLOW-ON TESSAS

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Norwich & Peterborough	01733 372222	Follow-on Tessa	5 Year	£100	8.00%	Year
Parsons BS	0800 807000	Follow-on Tessa	5 Year	£100	8.00%	Year
Shepherd BS	01509 503002	Follow-on Tessa	5 Year	£100	8.00%	Year

GUARANTEED INCOME BONDS (net)

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
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Capital One Bank	0800 888000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
Co-operative Bank	0800 100000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
RBS Advance	0800 777770	Visa	0.54% H	£5.00	£50	56 days

OFFSHORE ACCOUNTS (gross)

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
-----------	---------	------	-------	------------	----------	----------

Northern Rock Bank	01481 718121	Instant Premium	10.0%	£10.00	£10.00	Year
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Northern Rock Bank	01481 718121	Instant Premium	10.0%	£10.00	£10.00	Year

NATIONAL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (gross)

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
-----------	---------	------	-------	------------	----------	----------

Investment Accounts	1 Month	£20	4.75%	Year	£20	£20
Investment Accounts	2 Month	£20	4.75%	Year	£20	£20
Investment Accounts	3 Month	£20	4.75%	Year	£20	£20

INVESTMENT TRUSTS

Telephone	Account	Rate	APR %	Annual fee	Min. amt	Comments
-----------	---------	------	-------	------------	----------	----------

Capital One Bank	0800 888000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
Co-operative Bank	0800 100000	Visa	0.55% H	£5.00	£50	54 days
RBS Advance	0800 777770	Visa	0.54% H	£5.00	£50	56 days



BRIAN TORA

Laggards and leaders

How reassuring it was to see the FTSE 250 and the Small-Cap Indices move into new high ground this week. The bad news is that it highlights how difficult it is to find value amongst the top 100 companies. Still, at least it shows that UK managers are not completely bound into buying only those shares that the global money shunters are prepared to consider.

Of course, it remains the increasing popularity of tracker funds that have been driving the big market capitalisation stocks. Witness the way in which Misy's shed a few pennies while Compass received a boost to its share price on the news that the contract caterer rather than the IT specialist achieved the coveted place in the index of Britain's 100 most successful companies.

It was Dixon's that received the wooden spoon. It tells you a lot about UK PLC when a leading retailer loses its coveted slot and the main contenders are pure service businesses. Interestingly, Misy's would have been the only IT company to have earned a place in the index.

How different things are in the US. Aside from the fact that Microsoft is now the world's second or third-largest company in terms of market capitalisation, you only have to see the way in which any business linked with helping the internet operate finds its shares instantly in demand. If you look at the top 25 internet companies in America, you find they are worth in aggregate nearly \$40bn. Very appropriate, you may say, but most of them do not make a profit. That amounts to a great deal of faith out there concerning the world wide web. I hope it is justified.

If I were seeking to tuck money away wisely at present, I would be tempted to tuck the second 250 stocks in the FTSE Index. Sometimes known as the 'Tootsies', these are now big companies, many of them worth comfortably over £1bn. They have been left out of the equity rush, partly because they tend not to excite those American managers trying to gain a toe-hold in Europe.

It is the growth of support for FTSE 100 funds that causes me most concern. What happens if the market takes a dive? Just as indexation has become a driving force for the market, so it could accelerate any bear market and intensify its severity. At least a reverse would give active managers a chance to come back into their own.

At present our own researchers rather favour two acronyms from within the second tier of Britain's companies. BTP and Emap are very different businesses. Capitalised at £600m and £224bn respectively, one lingers just outside the FTSE 100, while the other represents a more typical medium-sized British company. Emap (or East Midlands Allied Press as it used to be known) has become less - much less - of a regional press concern than a European magazine and regional broadcasting group. BTP used to be known as British Tar Products and produces specialist chemicals for industrial giants. Both look capable of sustaining above average growth, while enjoying what is these days relatively modest ratings. Sadly, neither are technology stocks, but that may save you money in the short term.

Brian Tora is chairman of the Greg Middleton Investment Strategy Committee.

The Growth & Protection PEP

1 Subject to Government regulations. Performance is based on the difference between the weighted average level of the FTSE 100 Index, the DAX 30 Index, the CAC 40 Index and the SMI Index in the first 12 months commencing 17 April 1998 and the weighted average level of the same indices in the last 12 months commencing 17 April 1997. Minimum investment £2,000. This is not a guaranteed investment. Returns depend on investment with stocks and bonds and are subject to market fluctuations. The value of your investment before fees may fall as well as rise and is not guaranteed. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. The benefits are based on our understanding of current market conditions in the United Kingdom and Ireland and are subject to change. The value of an investment depends on your individual circumstances. Only one independent market valuer is appointed. Transfers in to the Growth & Protection PEP do not incur any exit charges. Full details are available on request. The Government published a consultation document in December 1997 on proposals for individual savings vehicles (ISAs) to be introduced in April 1999. The terms and limits for converting an existing PEP into

The irresistible rise of the second liners



THE JONATHAN DAVIS COLUMN

Just as it was in the last great bull market which reached its peak in 1968-1972, the current stock market surge has been characterised by the extraordinary strength of large company shares and the relatively poor performance of smaller company shares.

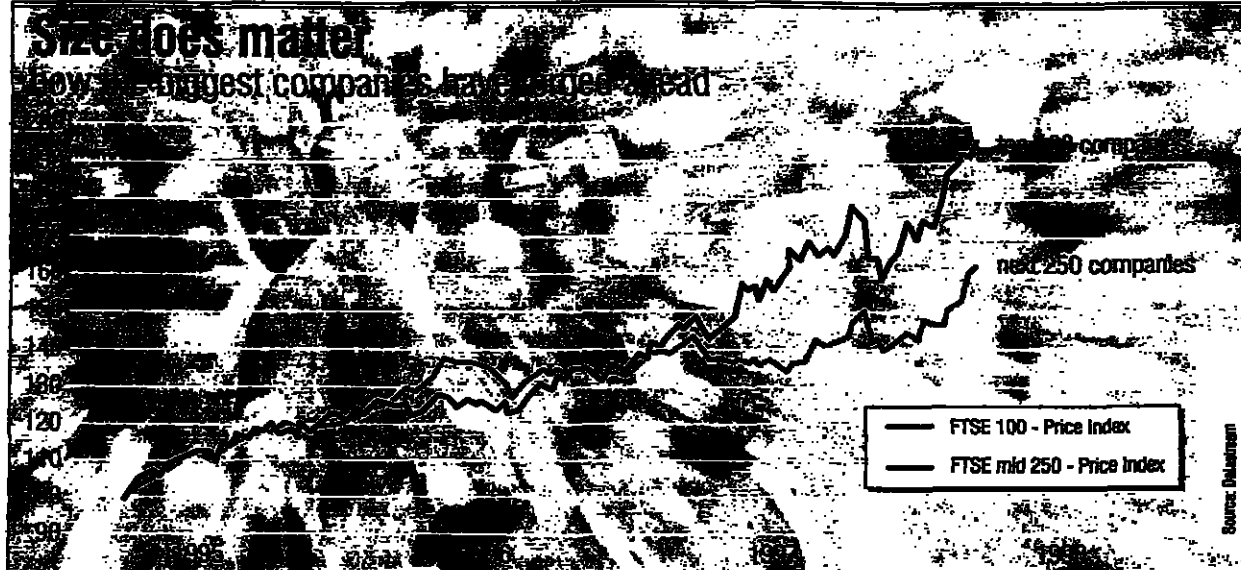
Any professional investors who have failed to invest in large companies over the last two to three years have inevitably found themselves lagging behind in performance. As the chart shows, the Footsie index of 100 largest shares has comprehensively outperformed the 250 index, which tracks medium-sized companies, and the All-Share.

The same phenomenon has taken its toll in the unit and investment trust business. The performance figures for funds which specialise in UK smaller companies tell their own story.

The average unit trust in the smaller company sector has produced a return of 10.1 per cent since the start of 1997. The All-Share index, by contrast, has returned almost three times as much (27.0 per cent) over the same period. Even the very best performing fund in the smaller company sector has only returned 22.3 per cent, 5 per cent less than the market overall.

It is the same story, if not worse, in the investment trust world. Over three years the performance of smaller company specialist trusts has badly lagged that of the generalist trusts. At the same time, the discounts to asset value have widened, further depressing investors' returns.

In fact, apart from Far East and emerging market funds, the smaller company sector trades on a wider average discount than any other investment trust sector - 14.9 per cent, according to the broking firm Nat West Markets.



The phenomenon of smaller company underperformance dates back several years. Since 1988, there has only been one year (1993) when smaller companies have comprehensively outperformed the market as a whole. Ironically, it was only in the 1980s that academic researchers discovered what they came to call the "small company effect". This was the discovery that, contrary to the principle of efficient markets, there appeared to be clear and sustain-

able advantage to be had from investing in smaller company shares. In other words, returns from smaller companies were higher than you would expect even after making allowance for their higher risk.

As so often in the stock market, no sooner had this new phenomenon been discovered than it started to vanish. Paul Marsh and Elroy Dimson, two Professors at London Business School who have closely monitored the small company effect

from its first appearance, concluded in their latest annual survey published a few weeks ago that for all intents and appearances the small company effect had now disappeared.

All sorts of explanations - some more convincing than others - have been advanced to explain why smaller companies should fare better in some periods and not so well in others. The most obvious one relates to the prevailing economic climate. When the climate is sta-

ble, so this argument goes, with low inflation and steady sustained growth, as it is now, it tends to favour larger companies. They have greater freedom to secure economies of scale and develop and exploit their pricing power.

By contrast, when inflation is high, and the economy turbulent, the inflexibility of large companies is a disadvantage. They find it harder to adapt to rapid shifts in demand. Smaller companies, by contrast - at

least those that survive - are better able to obtain a competitive edge. There are greater returns to entrepreneurship.

Whatever the reason, the interesting question now is whether the tide is once again about to turn in favour of smaller companies. There are certainly some pointers to that effect. The latest survey of fund manager intentions by Merrill Lynch suggests, for example, that institutional fund managers have recently started to increase their exposure to small and medium-sized companies.

On value grounds, many of these companies now look attractively priced, at least when compared with the demanding ratings of the biggest companies. Whichever way you look at it, shares in the FTSE 100 are not cheap. On a p/e ratio of 21, and a yield of 2.3 per cent, the Footsie index is discounting an awful lot of good news.

For tactical reasons, therefore, the arguments for looking elsewhere make sense. A number of US fund management houses are said to have been picking up shares in the FTSE 250 index in the last few weeks on value arguments of this kind. It would not be at all surprising if the dramatic recent outper-

formance of the Footsie index over other sections of the market was to falter this year.

But will it be more than a temporary rebalancing of the past disparity in performance? Scanning the visible economic horizons, it is hard to see any fundamental reason why the prevailing economic climate should turn against larger companies and back in favour of their smaller brethren. As the split in the Bank of England's monetary policy committee demonstrates, there are real concerns about the possibility of a short-term blip in inflation. But there are as yet no signs it will be anything other than a blip.

However, the value arguments for smaller companies may be more compelling. For anyone who follows a contrarian investment philosophy, the fact that the smaller company effect should now be being written off is a classic indicator that it may now be about to return.

Of course, if the current fashion for large company shares also proves to be the apotheosis of the whole bull market, then a return to relative favour may be of scant consolation. But a burst of short-term outperformance by smaller company specialists is now overdue.

The cost of cut-price mortgages

Discounts, fixed rates, capped rates, the permutations of cut-price mortgages seem endless. Lenders want you to borrow. But where the incentives are very attractive, is there a catch?

Lenders can no longer require you to take life insurance and savings policies with the insurer of their choice. Existing policies should be fully transferable when you move from one lender to another.

But this does not apply to buildings, contents or accident, sickness and unemployment (ASU) insurance. None of these is covered under the best advice clauses of the Financial Services Act. As a result, buying one or more of these types of cover from a lender can be made a condition of qualifying for a discount loan.

Because these products are not sold on the "best advice" basis governing the sale of life products, lenders are not obliged to find you the cheapest cover available.

Of course, discounted and fixed-rate loans are still available if you insist on finding your own insurance, but you must expect to incur interest rate increases of between 0.25 per cent and 0.5 per cent on the cost of money borrowed.

Take buildings insurance as an example. This covers the rebuilding cost of the property to be purchased, which usually exceeds the market value by a factor of up to 50 per cent. Standard cover includes an accidental damage clause, against factors like fire and flood.

Premiums for building insurance can vary massively. Asked to quote on identical terms - a flat in Edinburgh with a rebuild cost of £200,000, AA

Check the small print before you sign up for a cheap loan. By Iain Morse

Insurance Service came up with an annual premium of £59.72. Meanwhile, National Direct quoted an annual premium of £215.28, and Newcastle Direct a premium of £403.44.

Both of these premiums were quoted as part of fixed-rate packages; Nationwide offered a 1.8 per cent discount off their SVR, equalling 6.3 per cent for three years, and Newcastle 5.99 per cent fixed for three years. Other lenders like Woolwich, and Abbey National quoted at least £350pa while the mutual Skipton BS came top, quoting a premium of £474.60 a year, again as part of a discounted loan.

Accident, sickness and unemployment policies are becoming more popular with lenders. Several offer them along with house or contents cover on the basis that borrowers must choose two out of three of these policies to qualify for a discount mortgage.

According to Ray Boulger, of mortgage broker John Charcol, "In almost all cases, anyone under 40 can find cheaper ASU cover either direct from an insurer like ITT London & Edinburgh, or from a mortgage broker."

At least one reason why lenders make these types of insurance compulsory are the levels of commission they receive, which can amount to as much as 40 per cent of premi-

ums paid over the policy term. Redemption penalties also apply to these loans, but the basis for charging can differ widely. Some apply a fixed percentage of the amount borrowed. As a general rule, the greater the incentive, the greater the penalties of redeeming a loan before the set period.

According to Mr Boulger, anyone tempted by a special deal should look closely at the small print. "Avoid redemption penalties that last longer than the discounted or capped rate on offer. That way, you are free to look for another deal when the first one runs out."

Take Scarborough BS, currently offering a one-year fixed rate loan at just 1.25 per cent. A redemption penalty fixed at 7.19 per cent of the amount borrowed applies for the first five years of the loan. After the first 12 months, this loan reverts to Scarborough's SVR of 8.69 per cent, currently 0.2 of one per cent above the average charged by major lenders.

Most such redemption penalties are set at 5 per cent of the amount borrowed, but for those contemplating partial early repayment, care is needed, as the penalty is set not on the outstanding balance at the time of redemption but the full amount for borrowed.

Early redemption penalties are avoidable, but only if you re-mortgage with the same lender, borrowing the same or more. Most will charge the penalty, then pay it back as a credit, reducing the amount of the new loan. But purchase of your new home will have to be completed within three months of redeeming your first loan to qualify.

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The lure of offshore gains

As ISAs with their £50,000 cap loom, investors are sending their savings into exile. By Iain Morse

Sales of offshore bonds and insurance policies are booming as the Budget looms. With the prospect of personal equity plans (PEPs) and tax-exempt special savings accounts (Tessas) being scrapped in 1999, the lure of these investments is strong. But savers tempted by the prospect of tax-free gains

are putting cash into investments designed for expatriates. Peter Nightingale, of accountants Deloitte Touche, warns "many of these offshore vehicles pay high commission to intermediaries, and offer little real saving to anyone living here. They are sold as a substitute for good tax planning".

A number of British insurance companies, like Allied Dunbar and Scottish Widows, have set up offshore arms based in the Channel Islands, Dublin and Luxembourg. These havens levy tax on fund income of 20 per cent or less, with no charge on capital gains.

But UK taxpayers are still liable to tax on encashment of such policies, after deducting the original amount invested. The key difference is that because these funds roll up free of tax, they allow its deferral and should give better performance than UK based equivalents.

Clerical Medical International estimate the net gain for a basic-rate taxpayer in an offshore bond could be as much as 10 per cent of the amount first invested, but only after holding the bond for 15 years or more. The gain for a higher-rate taxpayer is even greater, but early encashment brings heavy penalties.

Better value can be found in FSA recognised offshore funds,

mostly run through Luxembourg. These are similar to unit trusts.

Nigel Davies of Arthur Anderson suggests "These can be useful for those with capital but no income. Funds pay only a 15 per cent withholding tax. Using both your personal allowance on income tax and annual exemption on capital gains means that you can realise up to £10,545 tax free."

Many UK banks and building societies also run offshore accounts, paying interest gross. Abbey National (Jersey) return 6.2 per cent gross for deposits of £10,000 or more on instant access. Onshore, their 30-day account yields just 4.98 per cent gross for the same amount.

Income tax is payable on interest received but for non taxpayers, rates can equal those from Tessas. If you have no other source of income, your personal allowance of £4,045 means you can hold over £50,000 in an account paying 7 per cent gross.



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New Year resolutions for the tax avoider

As a new Budget and the end of the tax year approach, Tony Lyons does some financial stock taking

It is at this time of year that we should all ensure we have made the best use of the tax system for investing our hard-earned savings.

With the financial year ending on 5 April, we should make full use of whatever tax benefits there are when it comes to putting our money away, whether saving for a rainy day, a comfortable retirement, or whatever.

This year it's more important than ever. On Tuesday, Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will announce his new Budget. And it promises to be a wide-sweeping, tax reforming Budget.

We already know that personal equity plans (PEPs) and tax-exempt special savings accounts (Tessas) have

just one more year and what's left of this tax year to run. After this, they will be replaced with Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs).

But, as is usual at this time of year, rumours are swirling around about many other changes that may be announced. These include measures to limit tax avoidance even further, including culling the tax benefits of offshore investment.

Inheritance tax may also be changed. Another rumour is that pension investment made by individuals may only attract basic-rate income-tax relief. This latter piece of rumour, however, sits badly with the Government's plans to issue a green paper later this year which will unveil its thoughts on future pensions provision, how it will encourage us to do more to save for our retirement, and its ideas on the creation of the stakeholder pension.

So now is a good time to get your financial house in order. This does not mean you should suddenly switch your savings because of rumours, rather it is prudent housekeeping.

For example, PEPs have been an

outstanding success with somewhere in the region of £50bn invested in them since they were first introduced in 1987. It makes sense to use your full allowance in what is left of this tax year and for 1998/99.

Even if you think share prices are too high in the stock market and could be heading for a fall, there are various schemes available from a number of different managers that will guarantee at least your original capital investment.

But a word of caution. Never invest in anything just because it offers tax savings. You should only put your money into an investment because it suits your purposes. Don't take risks you cannot afford. Make sure that whatever you look at meets your investment aims. After all, the higher the risk, the more chance there is that you could end up losing money.

Whether you are looking to put away a lump sum or a regular amount each month, whether you want to invest for the long term - five years or more - or the short term, there are various schemes on offer. In order to guide you through the sifting process, this survey

looks at some of the currently available means of tax-free investment.

When looking to tax-free investment, here are 10 rules to remember:

- Never invest more than you can afford.
- Don't invest just because of the tax benefits.
- Make sure you understand, and like, what you are investing in.
- Always compare charges.
- Look at past performance of various competitors - it will not forecast the future, but it may be the only guide you'll have.
- Some schemes are complex, so get financial advice if you feel you need it.
- If seeking advice, qualified independent financial advisers are best.
- Some schemes, such as personal pensions, can be very inflexible, make sure you understand any penalties such as what happens if you stop payments.
- Make sure that you are happy to lock up your savings for what could be a long time.
- Don't rush into an investment just because you fear the Budget could make changes.

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صحتنا من الاموال

The first shot in a tax offensive

Tax planners believe a Government crackdown on offshore trusts means we are in for a tough Budget. Paul Slade reports

The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, acted last week to bring forward one of his planned Budget measures - closing an obscure but lucrative tax loophole.

The loophole allowed rich offshore trust holders to save capital gains tax (CGT) by bringing trusts set up before 1991 back onshore (see box for details). Although only a few hundred people use this procedure, the sums involved are huge.

The Treasury believes that by bringing this planned Budget measure forward 11 days to apply from 6 March, it has saved up to £1bn in revenue which otherwise would have been lost.

Most of the people benefiting from the loophole were company directors involved in management buyouts or directors of privatised companies, both of whom could see enormous gains on the shares they held.

Whenever a Budget change like this is anticipated, the products to be barred are frantically promoted on a "buy-now-while-stocks-last" basis.

Philip Harrison, tax partner at Eversheds, a national law firm, says: "Although this has been known about

for years, it's only recently that it's become prevalent. Some of the specialist firms of tax consultants have been mail-shooting people. I think what's happened is that it had become too well-known, and the Government decided to crack down on it."

Tim Jones, of accountants Arthur Andersen, says: "It was a very complex manoeuvre, involving very fancy professional fees. We're talking about really big gains here. One person could have £200m worth of gains. Capital gains tax on that, at 40 per cent, is £80m."

Mr Jones and Mr Harrison agree that this move suggests the Government will adopt a tough stance on other tax-planning measures. Mr Jones warns: "This flags the Government's intention to attack those trusts with shares in them which are pregnant with gains, and haven't yet been liquidated."

Mr Harrison says: "The Government is serious about putting a stop to this sort of thing. We all know that there have been plenty of people who have gone in for tax avoidance.

"There have been lots of loopholes - entirely legal ones - and there's no way you can argue with the Government for closing some of those down."

A Treasury spokesman says: "The Chancellor has always made it clear that the Government is committed to looking at tax avoidance and closing loopholes in each Budget. This Budget is an opportunity to see what further loopholes or tax-avoidance measures need to be tackled."

The Chancellor is expected to use his Budget on 17 March to announce consultation on introducing a general anti-avoidance measure. One form this could take would be allowing the Inland Revenue to disregard any transaction if it believed the main purpose of that transaction was to avoid tax.

Many experts fear a provision like this would deter companies from making perfectly innocent transactions, for fear the Revenue would accuse them of trying to dodge tax.

Mr Harrison says a general measure would be workable only if the Revenue were prepared to clear planned transactions in advance.

HOW THE OFFSHORE TRUSTS MANOEUVRE WORKED

David Smith is planning a management buy-out of Acme Ltd, a private company.

In 1985 he sets up an offshore trust in his own name to buy the company's share capital of £50m. The trust is set up and run by a merchant bank, Offshore Partners (Jersey). Because it is based in the Channel Islands, it has no need to pay UK tax.

At the time of the buy-out, the trust's assets are worth £50m. In the years since then, the trust's assets have grown to £100m. The trust's assets are now worth £100m. The trust's assets are now worth £100m.

For many years, the trust has been able to avoid paying UK tax on its capital gains. This is because the trust is based in the Channel Islands, which has no need to pay UK tax.

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The benefits of being in a friendly society

Personal equity plan (PEP) managers and Tessa providers are looking anxiously towards the Budget as Gordon Brown is expected to release the full details of the new Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs), which will replace the existing tax-efficient investments plans. For friendly societies, however, the new accounts will represent an opportunity.

The Chancellor has already announced that friendly societies will be able to offer ISAs, in addition to their existing tax-free, 10-year savings plans. It in effect means that they will be able to compete on more or less level terms with the big institutions when it comes to attracting savers. However, the chances of friendly societies spending massive amounts on advertising any new ISAs are slim. In reality, they are likely to continue offering their members a range of products with few frills or costs.

At the heart of the friendly society deal is the 10-year savings plan. These accounts are able to offer tax-free savings because they contain an element of life assurance.

"Friendly societies provide a nicely packaged savings product which grows tax-free," says Barry Chambers, marketing director at Family Assurance, one of the leading societies. "A lot of people earmark the cash for a particular event, such as wedding anniversary celebrations, or just some cash for children or university costs."

The Government is keen to encourage people to have adequate life assurance and that is why the plans are granted tax-free status. However, the life assurance element of the plan is pretty small and the accounts

The tax-breaks that the friendly movement can offer their savers will be extended when ISAs arrive. Simon Read reports

are generally sold as savings schemes.

The maximum monthly amount you can put into a friendly society 10-year savings plan is £25, or savers can invest up to £270 a year. To get the full tax-free status, the plans must be maintained for 10 years - cashing in early could mean a tax liability or the return of less than you've paid in.

Worse, if the plan is closed before 12 monthly payments have been made, there will be no return of cash at all. This is because of the life assurance element. Payments in the early years predominantly go towards paying the charges of that. However, some of the cash will also be invested on your behalf to ensure a payout after 10 years.

The investment is managed by professional fund managers who use their expertise to get maximum returns. In effect, the plans work in exactly the same way as endowment policies where some of the premiums pay for the life cover, and the rest is invested on your behalf.

Returns on the friendly society plans will be hit by the cost of life cover and expenses and charges, although friendly societies - stung by criticism about the size of charges - have been working hard to reduce costs as much as possible.

However, an illustration from Homeowners friendly society shows that someone investing the maximum amount each month - 3,000 over 10 years - would pay £598 in deductions, producing a real effect

of a £970 deduction from their fund. These deductions would bring investment growth of 9 per cent down to just 4.7 per cent a year. Hardly headline returns.

On the other hand, not using a friendly society savings plan means losing out on the tax benefits. IFA Promotion, a marketing body promoting independent financial advice, calculates that people already saving with an endowment policy are wasting £50m a year in tax by not saving in a friendly society.

"Too many people overlook friendly societies when planning their savings and investments," says David White, head of sales and marketing at Tynbridge

Wells Equitable. "As far as using their tax-free premium allowances is concerned, my advice is use it or lose it."

There are, in fact, hundreds of friendly societies around the country, but only a few offer products to the general public. Most restrict themselves to providing a range of benefits for their members.

This shows itself in the membership figures of friendly societies - 6 million people are part of the movement but only 1.5 million have a tax-free savings plan. The largest national friendly society is Liverpool Victoria. Looking ahead, the societies would like to see an in-

crease in the amount of cash people can save in their 10-year savings plan. "We would like to see the Chancellor increase the limit," says Mr Chambers. "The accounts are very attractive to many people who like the discipline of having to save regularly. An increased limit would improve the attraction."

In the meantime, the larger societies are gearing themselves up for the launch of ISAs next year. Many already have ISA-ready accounts, but haven't been making a big noise about them. "We'll be concentrating on offering the accounts to our loyal customers," says Mr Chambers.

The Independent's 'Guide to Making Your Investments Work for You', sponsored by Wesleyan Assurance, can be obtained by sending in the coupon on page 4.

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How to fix credit rates

The rules on how lenders advertise their loans are set to change. John Andrew reports

At long last the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is taking a serious look at the regulations which prescribe the way in which mortgages are promoted. Last month the DTI published a consultation paper, "Clarification and Simplification of UK Consumer Credit Law".

If the proposals are introduced, it will end years of confusion for the consumer. The concept of the annual percentage rate of charge, more commonly known as the APR, was introduced in 1974. It was designed as a yardstick representing the true cost of credit including, for example, any arrangement fee and the cost of taking legal charges to secure the borrowing.

In 1980 regulations were introduced requiring the APR to be shown in all credit advertisements featuring an interest rate. The message was clear and precise: because lenders "must calculate their APR according to the same special rules, you can compare one type of credit with another". In a nutshell, "the lower the APR, the better the credit deal".

In 1989 these regulations were "simplified and modernised". Sadly, there was no attempt to cover new products - mainly fixed mortgages - and there was a complete disregard for the new ways in which credit was being promoted. Looking back, it is incredible Westminster, the DTI and the OFT did not recognise that promoting credit on TV is different from advertising in the written word.

With no guidelines as to how to promote fixed-rate mortgages the industry devised its own method. It was decided to base the APR on the fixed rate for the period that the rate was fixed, followed by the lender's stan-

dard variable rate for the rest of the mortgage term. This had the blessing of Lacots, the organisation of the nation's Trading Standards Officers (TSOs).

All went well at first. Then one or two lenders argued that a fixed mortgage could be followed by another. They therefore based the APR for their fixed-rate mortgages on the fixed rate for the entire term of the mortgage.

NatWest was one of the lenders who took this new approach. A TSO in Devon took exception and successfully brought a prosecution, but this was overturned in June 1993 by the High Court. The nation's TSOs were shell-shocked, especially as their counsel warned that this method could result in some lenders securing an advantage by offering a very low rate of interest for a short period and calculating its APR on that basis for the entire loan.

Despite its concerns, Lacots issued a statement to its members suggesting that it would be acceptable for lenders to calculate the APR for credit offers where there was an initial period of discount, on the basis that the discount applied to the entire period of the loan.

Enter the period of deeply discounted mortgages - only 1.49 per cent (APR 1.5 per cent) for first 12 months. As the rate would revert to the borrower's variable standard rate after a year, logically the yardstick should have been nearer APR 9 per cent.

The DTI is now proposing that there should be consistency, with lenders basing their APR on the discounted rate for the period of the lower rate and on their standard variable rate for the remainder of the time.

The DTI is to be congratulated on its proposals. However, its consultation should be extended to also cover the way credit cards are promoted. Currently, it takes a genius to decide which piece of plastic is the better buy. Let's have a level playing field for all forms of credit - not just part of it!

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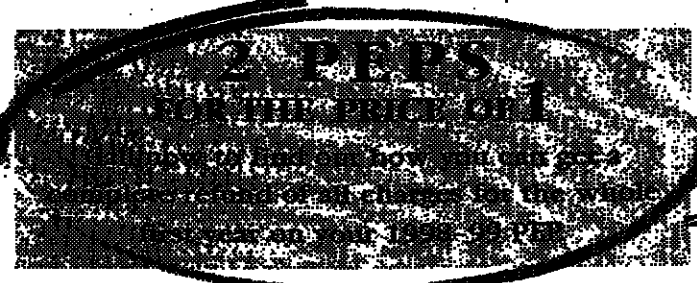
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Museums for mantelpieces

Rosalind Russell reveals a legal way to take gallery and museum exhibits home with you

On 1 April, a new shop opens within the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. It is described by marketing types as a destination shop. That is, you don't have to pay entry into the gallery or museum to buy a memento. They are already hugely popular in America. In New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art not only has an in-gallery shop, it has another busy Design Store on 44 W53rd St selling products for the home, including furniture and lighting. It's the equivalent of buying the T-shirt without having to go to the gig: useful, on a tight weekend break schedule.

The new National Gallery shop will sell goods inspired by works in the gallery, including a specially designed range of "image lights". They are ultra modern and feature detail from paintings in the gallery. They'll cost £25.

It's hardly surprising museums and galleries are turning themselves into department stores when you consider the amount of money to be made. Last year more than £97m worth of V&A brand tableware, furnishings and fashion pieces were sold worldwide. That includes everything from the V&A brand name talcum powder, sold in Marks and Spencer, to duvet covers by Dorma, carpets by Ryalux and wallpaper by Osborne and Little. Not all the branded goods are sold in the museum, but the licence fees have boosted the V&A's fortunes and made it a formidable business partner. In the annual report last year, the museum reported a growth in profits of 45 per cent. Sales at the shop were 47 per cent up, proving, says the museum, its "maturity" as a gift buying venue. And with more than 5 million objects in the collection to inspire designers, the opportunities appear limitless.

The Craft Council takes up some of the V&A shop space, selling one-off pieces by young contemporary British designers. Plates, cups, saucers and teapots are sold as individual pieces, making the purchase feel more like patronising young design than just buying a boxed set from Ikea. Prices cover a wide range, from £15 for a ceramic mug to £1,000 for a large red decorative plate by Rupert Spira, a collectable designer.

A new range of Limoges porcelain called William Morris Kensington Fruits is expected to appeal to customers comfortable with a classic design logo. The theme is apricots, peaches and cherries painted on a crackle glaze mustard-yellow background. The collection covers everything from a thimble at £8.95 to a set of dessert plates at £75.

The V&A's Iznik ceramics collection in the Islamic and Ceramic Galleries was the inspiration for an Iznik Revivals collection of five plates, made by craftsmen in Kutahya and Bursa, Turkey. The designs use the traditional shades of turquoise, aquamarine, green and red. At £120 a plate, they're more likely to be decorative than functional. A range of green Wedgwood ware is made by the grandson of the original maker, whose work is displayed in the museum. Prices go up to £76.95 for an oval plate.

You might think the Imperial War Museum would find it well nigh impossible to muscle in on this destination shopping business, but it has risen to the challenge. The Cabinet War Room in Westminster - part of the IWM - has just had its shop re-fitted in time for the Easter holiday rush. The mahogany fittings echo the War Rooms, as do the goods for sale.

Old-fashioned telephones, in red, green or black, cost £49.95. A radio, with the carcass designed to look like the 1930s and 1940s radios and showing the old wave bands, but with modern interior, costs £29.95. For your very own war-torn office desk you can buy an electric fan (£99) like those in every civil servant's office in India, or a banker's lamp with green shade at £29.95.

Other retailers have been quick to copy. The mail order firm The Art Room offers a shower curtain printed with Alma-Tadema's *A Favourite Custom*, painted in 1909 and hanging in the Tate. With detachable waterproof liner, it costs £39.95.

Contacts: Cabinet War Rooms, Clive Steps, King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AQ (0171-830 6961); The Art Room 01993 770444.



From the V&A's Crafts Council Shop: above, Christie Brown's 'Male Head and Shoulders'; far left, Fiona Salazar's 'Uncurling'; and left, Helen Talbot's 'Cooking it up for seven little men'

3 TO VIEW BY A GOLF COURSE

Number 1
Loansdalean
Cottages,
near Morpeth in
Northumbria, sits
right opposite the 18th
green of
Morpeth Golf Club. Bought by the present owners 11 years ago, when it was semi-detached, it has been renovated and restored as a three-bedroom, two-reception house. Apart from a 21-ft reception hall, there is a 20-ft lounge with doors to the rear garden, and a large dining room. The secluded garden includes mature trees, borders, and vegetable and fruit plots. GA Town & Country is asking £180,000 (01670 516711).



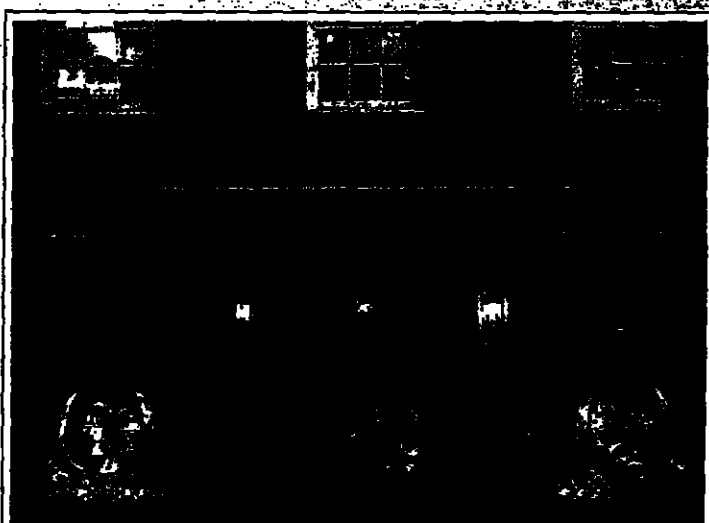
Kidallion, in Bramley, Surrey, is on a private road that runs along the northern boundary of an 18-hole golf course. The 12-year-old bungalow has a 25-ft reception hall, drawing and dining rooms, a study and three bedrooms. The drawing room has doors to the garden and terrace, and an electrically operated sun-blind. The large kitchen/breakfast room is fitted with gas hob, double oven and built-in breakfast bar. The gardens over more than a third of an acre, include a greenhouse, a summer house, a garage and lawns, with open views across the golf course. £450,000 through Browns (01483 531166).



Spindlewood, at Pyrford, near Woking, Surrey, has a 100-ft garden that backs directly on to the golf course. The three-reception, five-bedroom house, which was built in 1964, has since been extended. On the ground floor there is a study, a large family room, and a 25-ft sitting room with a raised fireplace and sliding patio doors leading to the garden. The main bedroom includes a dressing area with built-in wardrobes. The agent, Curchods, is asking £360,000 (01932 350011).



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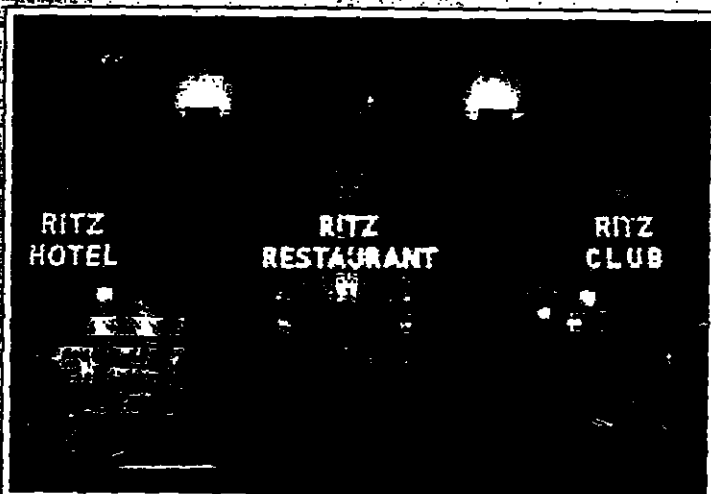
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